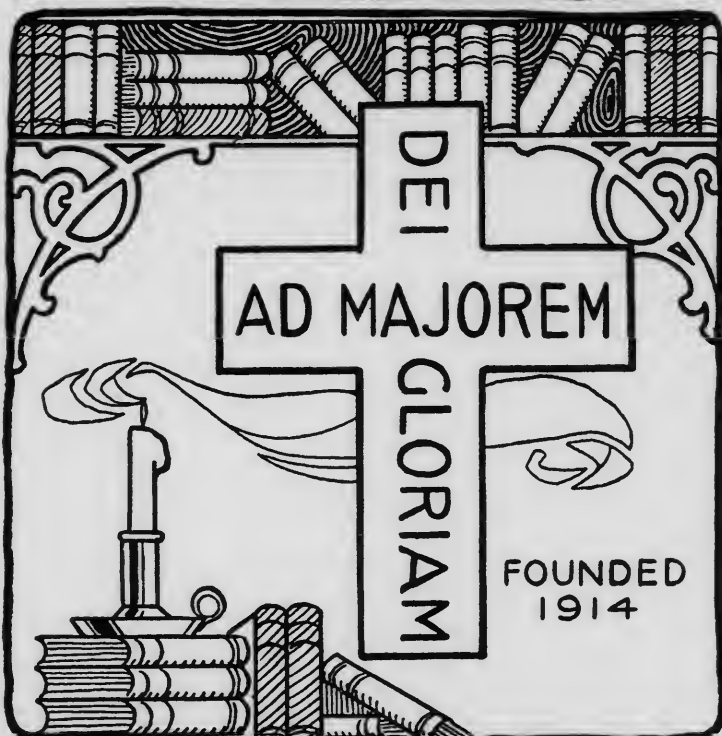


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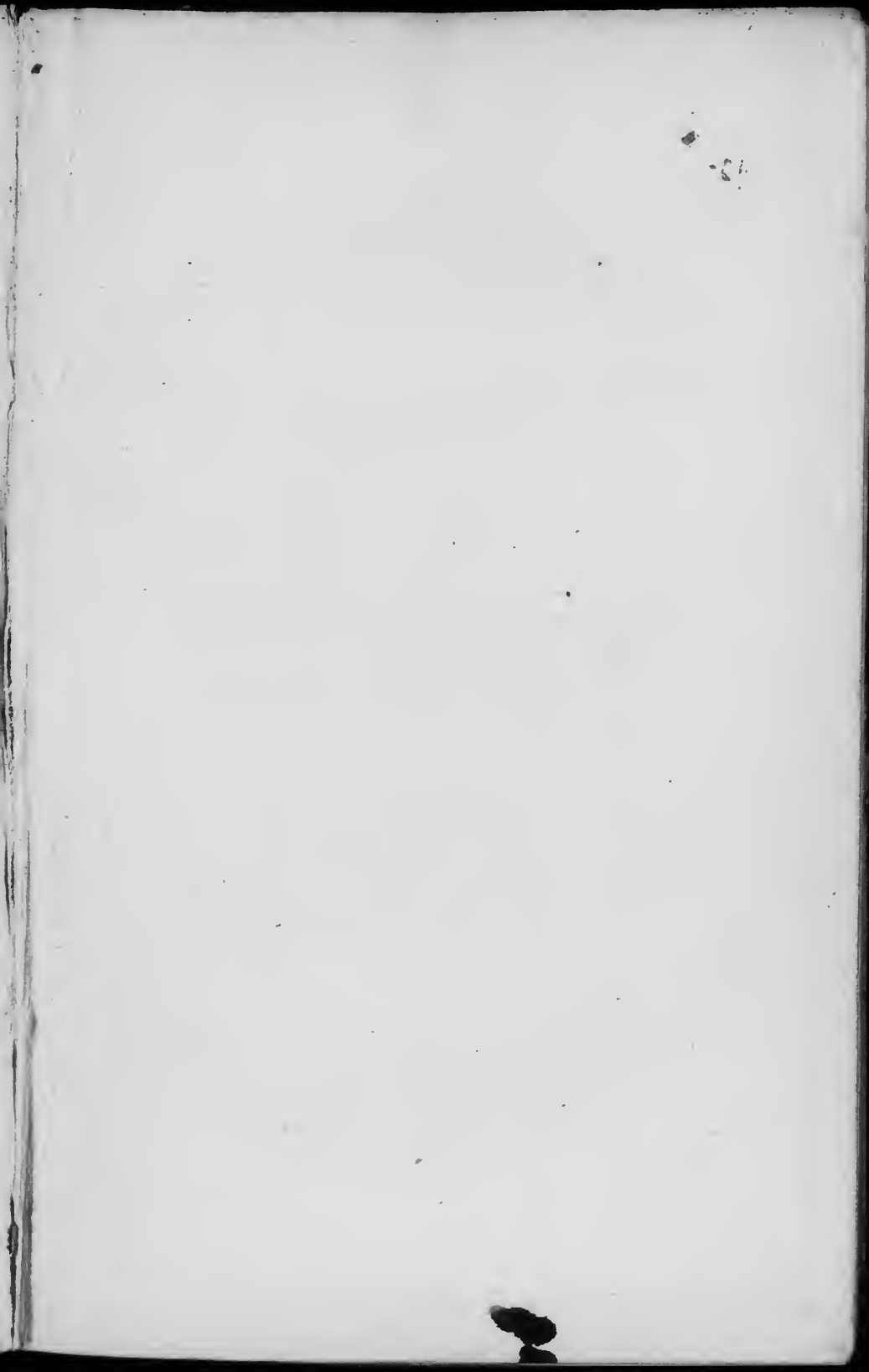
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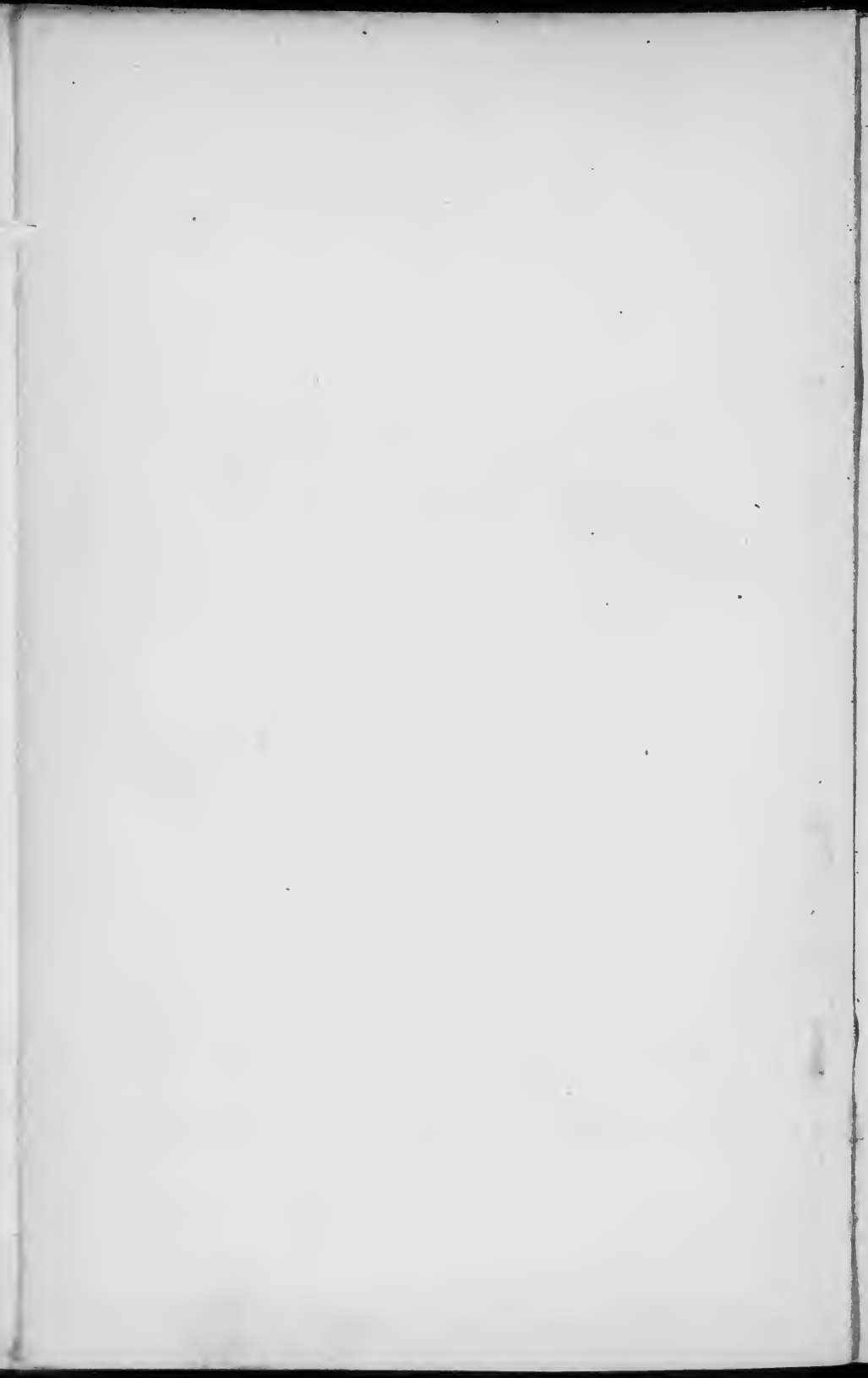
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WESLEYAN METHODISM
IN THE
CONGLETON CIRCUIT.

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THE HISTORY
OF
WESLEYAN METHODISM
IN THE
CONGLETON CIRCUIT;
INCLUDING,
SKETCHES OF CHARACTER, ORIGINAL LETTERS, &c.
BY THE
REV. J. B. DYSON.

LONDON :
SOLD BY JOHN MASON, 66, PATERNOSTER-ROW.
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TO
MR. WILLIAM HADFIELD
AND
MR. JOHN SUMMERFIELD,

The Circuit Stewards ;

AND TO THE SOCIETIES AND CONGREGATIONS
IN THIS CIRCUIT :

THIS ATTEMPT TO NARRATE THE PRINCIPAL INCIDENTS
CONNECTED WITH THE PLANTING AND GROWTH
OF WESLEYAN METHODISM IN THIS
LOCALITY,

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

BY THEIR AFFECTIONATE FRIEND AND PASTOR,

JOHN B. DYSON.



PREFACE.

THE memory of the past is like a stream, which bears the wreck of some noble structure on its bosom, while the analist may be compared to a person standing on its banks, trying to collect as many of its floating fragments as possible : but after his most careful and patient endeavours, he finds it impossible to reconstruct out of the disjointed materials, though ample they be, anything like a complete restoration of the original.

In the present attempt the narrator, although not satisfied in some respects with his gatherings, yet deems them too valuable to be again cast into the stream, and suffered to float down the dark waters of oblivion. If by this brief history he shall succeed in bringing the influences of the past to bear on the present and

future, so as to infuse a measure of the simple, earnest, self-denying, magnanimous, and godly spirit of the early Methodists into the hearts of the present race of Wesleyans, he will deem himself amply repaid for his toil.

J. B. D.

CONGLETON,

April 9th, 1856.

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HISTORY OF WESLEYAN METHODISM IN THE CONGLETON CIRCUIT.

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1738—1745.

The development of religion not like that of science—The light of Methodism sometimes arose in obscurity—Persecution overruled for good—Subordinate agents raised up in various parts of the nation—David Taylor's ministry—John Bennet's conversion—begins to preach—extent of his round—Separates from Mr. Wesley, and becomes the pastor of an Independent church—Mrs. Bennet noticed—Band-meetings explained—Preaching at Shrigley-fold, near Macclesfield—Thomas Buckley, from Astbury, and others attend—Mr. Wesley preaches at Roger Moss's, near Rode Hall.

THE development of religion cannot be compared to that of science, which resembles the dawn of day, whose light is first caught by the mountain tops, and thence reflected into the vallies below. The light of science has generally fallen on the elevations of

society—men of education—of lofty intellect and patient research, have been the first to receive its illuminations, and from them it has descended to the lower portions of society. Religion, however, has taken a course the reverse of this, having worked upwards, from the low to the high, from “small to great.”

In religion this result is not to be traced, as it may in science, to natural causes, but to a providential arrangement, designed to abase the pride of man. For “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise—yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are : that no flesh should glory in his presence.”

Thus the light of Methodism—revived primitive Christianity—has not seldom arisen in obscurity. But the heavenly spark once struck—it may have been in the heart of some humble cottager—has quickly burst into a spreading flame, so that in a multitude of instances, the “little one has become a thousand, and the small one a strong nation.”

The growth of this vine, (to change the figure,) of the Lord’s right hand planting, was in the midst of alien influences. Briers and thorns beset it, while it was swept by many a rude tempest ; but the dew of the Divine blessing was at its root, and it grew and flourished as the cedar of Lebanon.

The persecution which was permitted to overtake the infant cause, in the early days of Methodism, was, however, overruled for good. Nor is this by

any means a solitary instance. The blow which fell upon the church at Jerusalem, "scattered its members abroad," but, so far from putting them to silence, as it was intended, "they went everywhere preaching the word;" and that word grew, and churches were multiplied. The persecution which drove the Wesleys and Whitfield from the churches, caused them to go into the hedges and highways; and the result shews in this case, as well as in the former, that the means employed to crush the good work, were overruled by the hand of God and rendered subservient to its more rapid extension. The beneficial effects of their field-preaching, spread far beyond the crowds who were drawn together on Kennington Common and Moor-fields. The effect on the nation was like the radius on the stone-stricken waters, the surface of society was moved, and the commotion spread to the very borders of the land. Many of those who were attracted by this new thing in the earth, were from the country, and did not fail to inform their friends whom they had left there, of what was taking place in town. By this means, persons in almost all parts of the kingdom, were more or less prepared to receive the Gospel, when providence directed the steps of its agents amongst them. Others, Cornelius-like, sent in all haste to fetch some apostle of this great work, and then called together their kinsmen and friends, to hear words whereby they might be saved. Instances of this kind will be found in the following narrative.

At the same time the fact is not to be overlooked, that while God was preparing Wesley and Whitfield in London, he had raised subordinate agents in other parts of the nation. One of the earliest of these was David Taylor, who, from conducting worship in the family of Lady Betty Hastings, in Leicestershire, began to exhort sinners, and then to preach the Gospel—at first in the vicinity of Sheffield, and afterwards in that town, and various other parts. This was in the year 1738. For a time he was alone, and then he joined Mr. Benjamin Ingham, one of the six students expelled from the Oxford University. After hearing Mr. Wesley with great profit in London, he returned to his former sphere of labour, where with renewed zeal and great success, like another Baptist, he prepared the way for his more illustrious successor. Being, however, of an unstable mind, he did not excel; and after various fluctuations and changes, ended his days, it is true in union with Methodism, but in comparative obscurity.

The ministry of Taylor and some others, might be compared to small fountains. They poured out rills of living waters which fertilized the different districts where they flowed; but were at length absorbed in the more ample stream which took its rise under the Wesleys.

The most distinguished fruit of David Taylor's ministry, both as to its character and consequences, was seen in the conversion of John Bennet, a native of Chinley, in the Peak of Derby. Young Bennet,

who is said to have received a classical education with a view to a learned profession, had no sooner embraced the truth, than he began to imitate the example of his spiritual father, by exhorting sinners to flee from the wrath to come; and shortly after gave himself fully to the work of an itinerant preacher. He first thought of the christian ministry; but that was relinquished for a situation as justice's clerk to R. Bagshaw, Esq., of Sheffield; and then he turned his attention to business, and became a "regular carrier between Sheffield and Macclesfield, and employed a number of pack-horses for the purpose of conveying goods across the moors, over which carts and waggons were unknown to pass, till several years afterwards." In the year 1739, when he was about twenty-five years of age, he heard David Taylor at Sheffield, and was so struck with his earnest and devout manner, that under the impulse of the moment, he invited him to preach at his father's house at Chinley in Derbyshire. "David remarked in reply, 'I have no objection to go, if it will only be for the glory of God and the good of souls.' 'The good of souls!' thought Bennet, 'what can that mean?' Declaring afterwards, 'that he knew as little about his soul as the sole of his shoe.'" This novel language excited a feeling of misgiving, lest he had gone too far in inviting Taylor into Derbyshire, and by various expedients he tried to break off the engagement. God, however was leading him by a way that he knew not, and made him, though reluctant, the guide of Taylor to his

father's dwelling, where he stayed several days, and preached at Chinley and the adjacent villages, having young Bennet as his constant companion. During these services light gradually dawned on his mind, and he began to argue in favour of Taylor's doctrines, some time before his heart was effectually changed. Shortly, however, he was deeply convinced of his depraved state by nature, and in an agony of spirit, sought and obtained the remission of his sins.

He now relinquished all secular pursuits, and gave himself fully to the work of an Itinerant Preacher. His time, his strength, and his talents, which were considerable, were cheerfully employed in beseeching sinners to be reconciled to God. His extraordinary labours, which were attended with a remarkable blessing, rapidly extended into the adjoining counties of Cheshire, Lancashire, and Yorkshire, where many societies were raised, and which formed what was afterwards known as *John Bennet's Round*. This took place before his acquaintance with Mr. Wesley, to whom he was afterwards introduced by Lady Huntingdon.

The following was the extent of John Bennet's Round in 1744. Chinley in Derbyshire was headquarters. From thence it went on to Macclesfield, (Shrigley-fold) in Cheshire; Burslem, in Staffordshire; Alpraham, Chester; Holywell, in Flintshire; passing over the rising town of Liverpool; onward to Whitehaven, in Cumberland; and back to Bolton in Lancashire, Manchester, and Chinley; including many of

the intermediate towns and villages, thus embracing portions of six counties.

In 1743, he entered into close union with Mr. Wesley, and at once introduced him, John Nelson, and others into his round. In October 1749, he was united in marriage to Mrs. Grace Murray, whom Mr. Wesley calls his "right hand," and whom there is no doubt he had selected for himself, but was frustrated by his brother Charles who was strongly opposed to the union. In 1752, Mr. Bennet separated from Mr. Wesley and joined the Calvinists.

After this event, he became the pastor of an Independent church which he had organised at Warburton in Cheshire, where he laboured with zeal and success until the year 1759, when he died, bearing joyful testimony, that "The blood of Christ had cleansed him from all sin."

Mrs. Bennet retired to Chapel-in-le-Frith, where, for more than half a century she was an ornament to the christian profession. After faithfully filling the office of a class-leader for many years, she peacefully slept in Jesus, on the 23rd of February, 1803, aged 88. Her death was improved by the Rev. Jabez Bunting, and "her life" was published by her son, who became a dissenting minister.

We have reason to believe, as the narrative will shew, that Mr. Bennet's first opening for the gospel in these parts, was at the house of a person known as Old Mary Aldersley, who resided at Shrigley-fold two miles beyond Macclesfield. From thence Methodism

took a step in advance, when preaching was commenced in Macclesfield. The principal instrument of its introduction was Mr. George Pearson, grandfather of Samuel Pearson, Esq., of Buglawton Hall. In an account of all the persons who met in *Bands*,* in the different places which Mr. Bennet was in the habit of visiting, we find those of George Pearson and Samuel Rowbottom, of Macclesfield. Mr. Pearson opened his house for preaching, and had the honour of entertaining Mr. Wesley, and many of the first race of preachers.

It would have been interesting to the curious reader, could we have furnished more particulars respecting old Mary, and that early cottage-sanctuary; but we are able to present nothing beside names, and the fact that that was the first preaching-place to which several persons from the town and neighbourhood of Congleton resorted, prior to the introduction of the means nearer home.

The following are the circumstances which led to their attendance at Old Mary's. A young man of the name of Pedley, a silk weaver, went up to London in the year 1743, in search of employment. While there he heard Mr. Whitfield, and being impressed with his discourse, was induced to procure one of his printed sermons and sent it to his father in Congleton.

* Band-meetings are of two kinds, public and private. Private bands consist of two or three persons only, who meet weekly for christian conversation and prayer. Public bands consist of the members of private bands.

The sermon afterwards came into the hands of one of young Pedley's companions, of the name of Thomas Buckley, of Astbury. Thomas was a strict Churchman. Highly pharasaical in his views and feelings, he regularly partook of the Lord's Supper, and yet had no objection to aid in conducting a dance. He was honest, upright, and industrious, was looked upon as an excellent christian, and a good neighbour; but at the same time was totally ignorant of the gospel method of salvation.

Thomas read Whitfield's sermon again and again, but, to use his own words, saw nothing uncommon in it, until it pleased God to open the eyes of his understanding, and then, both the Bible and the Church Service seemed as new books to him.

At the same time, five or six others seem to have been affected in a similar manner, so that a common sympathy frequently drew them together. It does not appear, however, that they attempted any kind of worship, either public or social; yet, the "new light" was the theme of their conversation, and a strong wish was entertained for the Methodists to visit this part of the country. Their desire was speedily gratified. Tidings came that the Methodists preached beyond Macclesfield, at Old Mary Aldersley's already referred to. The very day on which the intelligence was received, Thomas and several of his companions went, and being well pleased with what they heard were induced to repeat their visits. Thomas Buckley's residence was a farm house, (since rebuilt) just

over the Canal Bridge, on the road from Astbury to Congleton Moss, eleven or twelve miles from Shrigley-fold.

"On one occasion," says Thomas, "old Mary brought information from another preaching at which she had been, that Mr. Wesley would preach at Roger Moss's, near Rode Hall." This was in the spring of 1745. In turning to Mr. Wesley's Journal under this date, although we do not find Roger Moss, or his residence named, we find a record in perfect agreement with this information. Mr. Wesley writes: "Friday and Saturday," [April 26th and 27th, 1745,] "at John Bennet's request, I preached at several places in Lancashire and Cheshire." *

Rode Hall is about five miles from Congleton. "When the night came," says Thomas, "six or seven of us went. My wife carried a child which was eight months old in her apron. When we arrived, there was Mr. Wesley and three more preachers. Mr. Wesley preached from Rom. iii. 23. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." He gave notice for preaching at five o'clock on the following morning. We got leave of Roger Moss to sit by the fire all night. We brought some little books to read."

What a fine instance does the conduct of this little band furnish of an ardent thirst for the waters of life. Think of that poor woman, who had carried her child so many miles, sitting up through the night

* Journal, Vol. I. p. 466.

to hear the gospel preached at five o'clock in the morning, and that with the prospect of carrying her charge the same distance home. Truly the word of God was precious in those days.

"When preaching was over," he continues, "we returned, well pleased with our journey. Mr. Wesley gave notice for preaching at the end of the month. We all resolved to go, which we did, and continued to attend through the following winter."

CHAPTER II.

1745—1749.

The conversion of Richard Moss, one of the early Methodist Preachers—begins to preach—narrowly escapes being pressed for a soldier—his health fails—becomes a Church missionary—Old-house-green, the probable residence of Roger Moss—"The work" breaks out at Betley and Alpraham—Astbury taken into John Bennet's round—Charles and John Wesley's first visit to Astbury and Congleton—The Rev. William Grimshaw preaches at Astbury—his character and labours noticed—John Nelson visits the societies in these parts—Conversion of Thomas Buckley—Mr. Richard Buckley, of Chester—Mr. Wesley's second visit—Death of a persecutor—Anecdotes of John and Charles Wesley—Yearly collection instituted.

ROGER MOSS, without doubt, was the father of Richard Moss, one of the first Methōdist preachers. Richard was born at Hurlston, near Nantwich, in Cheshire. In his life, found in the Methodist Magazine for 1791, he says, "when I was out of my time my father removed to a small farm." He does not say where the farm was situated, but taking the information before us as a clue, we may safely infer that it was in the vicinity of Rode Hall; and it was doubtless at the instance of the son Richard, who at the time had joined the society, that Mr. Wesley called and preached at the father's.

The youthful days of Richard Moss were spent in extreme licentiousness. When nearly twenty years of age he was awakened by an alarming providence. While hearing Mr. Whitfield on Kennington Common, a man suddenly dropped dead at his feet. This produced a powerful impression on his mind, which was deepened under a sermon from Mr. Wesley, which resulted in his sound conversion and union with the Methodists. He afterwards acted in the capacity of servant to Mr. Wesley, and while with him at Newcastle began to exhort, and afterwards to preach.

"On May 13th, 1745," he says, "I left Newcastle, and the next evening came to Birstal. I had not been long at John Nelson's before the house was filled. I sung and prayed, and gave an exhortation. And while I stayed there, I exhorted at all such opportunities as I thought were most for the glory of God.

"May 31, I went to brother Holmes's, at Sykehouse. Monday, June 3, about three o'clock in the morning, brother Holmes came and told me he had been awakened by a dream, that the constables and churchwardens came to press him for a soldier. He could not be persuaded but that something of this kind was on foot, and entreated me to rise and go to Norton. I rose, and he went with me about half a mile. At his return, he found the constables and churchwardens at his house, who asked, 'Where is the preacher? The minister has ordered us to take

all these preachers up, and send them away for soldiers.' Brother Holmes answered, 'I have just sent him away. But you will see him in that day, when God shall judge the world in righteousness.'

"I went to Epworth the next day. I had been speaking on Wednesday about a quarter of an hour, when the constable and churchwardens came and bade me 'stop, for they had a warrant to take me for a soldier.' They then cried out, with many curses and oaths, 'Bring him away, bring him away.' I knew in myself they could not touch me. The constable rushed in forward. I looked the man in the face, and he shrunk back, and said, 'I cannot take him.' Those behind (at the head of whom was the gentlemen of the town, who had all day been making them drunk enough for their work) cried out again, with abundance of oaths, 'But we will,' and ran in with all their might. They forced their way through the men; but the women kept so close together they could not get through them with all their strength. After trying in vain for near half an hour, they went out. I then began to speak again. But they soon returned with clubs and staves, beating down all who stood in their way. But those who were struck down quickly rose again and kept their ground, so that still they could not come nigh to me. I attempted to go to them several times, but the brethren held me back, till Mr. Mann came in, the chief gentleman of the town, who called to me to come down. I did so, and went with him into

the house, where we prayed and sang praise to God. About eleven he brought me out of the town himself, and then commended me to the care of our brethren, who conducted me to Robert Taylor's house, at Birnham, where we continued in prayer until four in the morning. I then took my leave and rode to Norton; thence to Leeds; and on Tuesday, June 11, to Sheffield.

"On Wednesday, 12, in the evening, I was speaking to some of the society, when the constables and churchwardens came in, saying, 'They had a warrant to press me for a soldier.' They took hold of me and dragged me down stairs, none making any resistance. Mary Bennet then said, 'Come, let us pray to God for him.' She began praying, and immediately one of the most serious of the mob who held me, left off cursing and swearing, and cried out, 'I will have nothing to do in this matter.' All the rest were of the same mind. So they let me loose, and went their way.

"Thursday, 13. I exhorted a great company, both morning and evening, and none molested us. The next day I went through Derbyshire to my father's."*

This was just seven weeks after Mr. Wesley's visit. And as Mr. Moss stayed until the following Monday, he would, no doubt, embrace every opportunity of preaching the gospel under his father's

* Methodist Magazine, vol. XXI. p. 1.

roof. He left home on Monday, 17th, and soon after rejoined Mr. Wesley in London. After preaching in various parts of the kingdom, he took a severe cold, through wearing wet clothes, which brought on fever, and so prostrated his strength that he was never able again to resume his itinerant labours. He was afterwards ordained by the Bishop of London as a missionary to one of the Bahama Islands; where he preached the gospel with success for some years, and then finished his course with joy.

Thus, then, we have traced the stream of this greatest of modern revivals, from Sheffield to Chinley, and from Chinley to Macclesfield, and thence to near Rode Hall. Here, however, we meet with a difficulty in discovering the exact locality of Roger Moss's residence. The probability is, that it was at or near to *Old-house green*, as a society existed there a few years later, which in all likelihood had its origin in the labours of Mr. Wesley, Richard Moss, John Bennet, and others, at the period to which our narrative refers.

A gracious work broke out at Betley, by which, as usual, the demon of persecution was aroused. Mr. Wesley gives the following account of it :—

“Tuesday, September 3. Great was our joy in the Lord at the public reading of the letters. Part of one was as follows :—

“Betley, near Namptwich, August 24, 1745.

“I rejoice that the Lord stirs you up more and more to labour in his vineyard. I am persuaded it is not

a small matter, whether we speak or let it alone. If I go into any company and there be an opportunity to exhort, and I come away without using it, I am as much condemned in my conscience as if I had robbed them. Pray for me, that I may have patience to endure the contradiction of sinners; and that I may always remember 'The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.'

"Sunday, August 4. We met as usual. As soon as we had begun prayer, there came the curate with a lawyer. He stayed till we had done prayer and then asked, 'What is the intent of your meeting?' I answered, 'To build each other up in our most holy faith.' He said, 'But what method do you use?' I answered, 'This is the third Sunday that I have met these my brethren. The first Sunday we read the fifth chapter of St. Matthew, and exhorted one another to follow after the holiness and happiness there described. Last Sunday we considered the sixth. And now, if we are not hindered, we shall go on to the seventh.' He bade us go on and he would stay a little and hear us. By the desire of the rest I read the chapter; which I had scarce done, when the lawyer began a long harangue, concerning the danger we were in of running mad. I answered, 'Sir, as I perceive you have no design to help us, if you will not hinder us we shall take it as a favour.' He went out directly and left the curate with us; who began to exhort us not to be over anxious about our salvation, but to divert ourselves a little. I told him,

‘Sir, we desire whatever we do, to do all to the glory of God.’ ‘What,’ said he, ‘do you deny all diversion?’ I said, ‘All which does not agree with that rule.’ He hurried away, and said as he went, ‘I wish you do not fall into some error.’

“The following week, grievous threatenings were given out, of what we should suffer if we met again. On Friday, 9, a gentleman sent for me, and told me he would hire a mob to pull the house down; for we were the most disturbing dogs in the nation. I said, ‘Sir, if there be a disturbance now it will lie at your door. A few of us intend to meet on Sunday, after sermon, to encourage one another in serving God. You say if we do you will have the house pulled down: and then you will say we have made the disturbance.’ He said he would send for me another time, and have an hour’s discourse with me.

“On Sunday, the man at whose house we were to meet, was warned by his landlady not to receive us; for if he did the house would surely be pulled down. However, he did receive us. A great many people coming about the house, he told them, if they had a mind, they might come in; so they came in, as many as the house would hold. I told them all the design of our meeting. Then we prayed, and I read the first chapter of St. James, and spoke a little on those words, ‘If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.’ And two more of our brethren testified, by their own experience, that he is a God of truth. They

stood as dumb men till we had done, nor did one afterwards open his mouth against us.

"From this time we have been threatened more and more, especially by the gentry, who say they will send us all for soldiers. Nevertheless, on Sunday, 18, we had a quiet and comfortable meeting. We considered the third chapter of the first Epistle of St. Peter, which was the evening lesson for the day. We were thankful for the record that is there left us of the treatment we are to meet with. And we are all much humbled, that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for the sake of Christ.

"I have been ill this fortnight, having got a great cold, but am obliged to keep it to myself as much as I can ; because a person here cannot have the very form of godliness, but if he is sick, that is the cause of it. I seem not to desire life or death, but that the will of God may be done."*

Who was the writer of the above letter, and where did he obtain his first good ? In answer to these queries we are met by a difficulty which we cannot but regret, the absence of the writer's name. This, together with the lapse of time, renders it probable that the name of this excellent and sensible man will remain unknown until the great day shall reveal it. As to the other questions, what is so probable as to suppose that he had heard Mr. Wesley at Roger Moss's. This "little flock" was afterwards driven

* Wesley's Journal, vol. I. p. 487.

out of the village by Sir Thomas F——r, and worshipped in a barn for many years, until the chapel was rector.

At Alraham, twelve miles from Chester, the cause had also taken root. A society was already in existence, which proved a fountain, whence many a refreshing and fertilising stream issued into the adjacent regions of barrenness and death. The way had been prepared by a piously disposed female, who had been driven away by persecution, and had gone to reside in London, just at the time field-preaching was commenced by Whitfield and Wesley. She heard them, and sent favourable accounts to her friends at Alraham. Her letters excited religious enquiry, especially amongst young men, who with Richard Cowley at their head, began regular meetings in the vestry of Banbury church. They were aided by the Bishop or one of the prebends of Chester, who presented them with Burkitt's Notes, on the condition that their meetings were continued in the vestry. On the appearance of John Bennet, John Nelson, and others in that part of the country, they were cordially received. Mr. Richard Cowling invited them to his father's house; a society was formed; the vestry association was broken up; and Burkitt's Notes, like many venerable folios hung in chains in our cathedrals, at a time when books were more scarce, and depredations might be more frequent, were to be seen chained in a conspicuous part of Bunbury church, where they remained for years.

It is probable that John Bennet was the first to visit Alpraham, and it seems he introduced John Nelson so early as 1743, who preached under a pear tree, near the house of Mr. Stephen Cowley, (father of Mr. Richard Cowley) in the village.

Astbury was taken into John Bennet's round in the spring of 1746. He had engaged to supply it with preaching, at the request of Thomas Buckley. The first preacher that came was Thomas Westall, who was one of the earliest co-workers with Mr. Wesley in arousing the nation from its spiritual slumber. He is said to have been a pattern of humility, christian simplicity, and love. He suffered much persecution, but continued a faithful minister of the gospel about forty years; and died in triumph at Bristol, in the seventy-sixth year of his age.

Thomas Buckley observes, "We thought ourselves happy in having the gospel preached under our own roof." And then states, "Mr. Westall published for Mr. Bennet to preach the next time. We informed our neighbours, and many came to hear; which they continued to do through the whole of that summer. Mr. Bennet was followed by Mr. C. Wesley,* who preached at Congleton Cross; † and in the spring of 1747, Mr. John Wesley preached at the same place. The subjoined is Mr. Wesley's account of this his first visit to Congleton:—

* He was on his way to the north. See Watson's Life of Wesley, p. 125.

† The Cross stood opposite the present Town Hall.

“Saturday, May 9, 1747. After preaching at Booth-bank in the morning, and at noon near Northwich, where some of the gay and rich came to hear ;” he says, “I continued praying and talking with them till past two : we were then obliged to take horse for Astbury. Here likewise I found an open door, though many fine people were of the congregation ; but they behaved as people fearing God ; as seriously as the poor ploughmen.” Mr. Wesley does not inform us where he preached, but it seems probable it was in the open air. The steps and green in front of the fine old parish church present an excellent situation for out-door preaching, which would not escape the practised eye of Mr. Wesley. He proceeds to say : —“Sunday, 10. I preached at Astbury at five ; and at seven proclaimed, at Congleton Cross, Jesus Christ, our ‘wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.’ It rained most of the time that I was speaking ; but that did not hinder abundance of people from quietly attending. Between twelve and one I preached near Macclesfield, and in the evening at Woodley-green.”

Mr. Grimshaw followed Mr. Wesley. The Rev. William Grimshaw’s character as a self-denying, zealous, and eminently successful clergyman is well known. Heartily co-operating with the Wesleys, he spared neither time nor strength in his endeavours to promote the spread of Methodism. It is said of him, that, “his health was firm, his spirit resolute, his understanding vigorous and practical ; and having but

one object, he continually pursued it, a stranger alike to fatigue and fear. With a slice of bread and an onion for his day's provision, he would trudge over the moors from dawn to summer's dusk, in search of sheep in the wilderness; and after a night's rest in a hay-loft would resume the work. In one of his weekly circuits he would think it no hardship to preach from twenty to thirty times. . . . When his career began, so sottish were his people, that it was hardly possible to draw them out to worship; but Grimshaw's boldness and decision dragged them in. Whilst the psalm before sermon was singing, he would sally forth into the street and the ale-houses and look out for loiterers, and would chase them into the church; and one Sabbath morning a stranger riding through Haworth, and seeing some men bolting out at the back windows and scrambling over the garden-wall of a tavern, imagined that the house was on fire, till the cry, 'The Parson is coming!' explained the panic."

The first John Nelson, also, took his turn in visiting these infant societies, which were springing up here and there; the first fruits of an extensive harvest. Nelson, as he himself tells us in his deeply interesting story, had sought comfort for his troubled mind in almost every sect, the Church, Dissenters, Quakers, and even the Romanists; but found no relief till he heard John Wesley, whose word went to his heart. Returning to his native village, Birstal, he began to beseech his neighbours to be reconciled to God, and thus, like Taylor and Bennet, paved the way for Mr.

Wesley, who found on his arrival there a large congregation. After labouring thirty-three years with great acceptance, he died in Leeds in 1774. A dense crowd, which extended nearly half a mile, followed his remains as they were carried to Birstal. Their silent sorrow testifying their esteem for this excellent minister. "They glorified God in me."

Thomas Buckley records his own conversion thus :—"I could not tell" he says "what to think of what they taught respecting knowing our sins forgiven. I could hardly receive it. One day, as I was winnowing corn in the barn, my thoughts being fully taken up with this strange doctrine, I began to lift up my heart to God in prayer, that I might know it. I then fell on my knees and prayed again and again, but found no answer. My mind was cast down, and full of heaviness all that night. It was the same when I rose in the morning, but as I was going down the lane to Astbury, it came into my mind as suddenly as if some one had called to me from the other side of the hedge, 'thou art saved for Christ's sake ; for the sake of what he did and suffered ; not for anything thou ever did'st or can'st do.' It came so suddenly that I stood still, with my face lifted up towards heaven, while my soul overflowed with wonder and love. I beheld the Lord Jesus with an eye of faith, and was filled with gratitude and praise. I went down the lane singing and praising God. I never to this day go past that place, but it comes fresh into my mind. Glory be to God for what he

has done for my soul! During the time I went so constantly to church, and thought myself so good a christian, I was in the dark, being totally ignorant of the scriptural plan of salvation. I imagined I must do all for myself, by striving to be good, and never thought of Christ as a sacrifice for sin. St. Paul saith—‘He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.’ And again, ‘But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.’”

Thomas Buckley was for many years a class-leader, and is spoken of as a good man. After the death of his wife, he went to reside with a daughter at Middlewich, from whence he came once a year to see his daughters and friends at Congleton. Before his return he always visited Astbury Church-yard, the place of his interment, that he might view what he termed his bed, where he expected shortly to lay his weary frame. Through a period of more than sixty years he adorned the doctrine of God his Saviour, saw most of his family walking in the truth, and at length died full of days, on the 17th July, 1806, in his ninety-first year.

The happiness which Thomas Buckley felt at having the gospel preached in his own house, was not to continue long undisturbed. Persecution arose, and he had to leave his farm. The watchful eye of the God of Providence, however, was over him. A more eligible farm was speedily offered, on which he

entered, and where the good hand of his God was upon him for good. An instance in proof of this is worthy of being recorded. A gentleman, a merchant from Chester, while on a visit, noticed one of Thomas's sons, a sharp and active youth, and engaged him in his service. Richard, for that was the name of the youth, soon displayed a capacity which fitted him to discharge more important duties than those which at first occupied his attention. This fact did not escape the notice of his master, who rewarded his diligence and fidelity by raising him from one post of responsibility to another, until at length he put him in possession of his own extensive business. Having heard the gospel preached by the Methodists, under his father's roof at Astbury, he embraced the same privilege in Chester. Here he was brought to a knowledge of the truth, joined the society, and for many years was an influential member. In the mean time business prospered, wealth accumulated, he rose in respectability, became an Alderman, and was chosen to fill the important office of Mayor of the city. He amassed a large fortune, and frequently expressed his intention to leave something handsome to the charities of Congleton, and especially to assist the trust estate of the Wesleyan Chapel. But in this case we are furnished with an illustration of the importance of the exhortation: "Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." He was suddenly cut

off by the cholera, which broke out in Chester in 1832, being one of its first victims.

Sixteen months after his first visit, Mr. Wesley was again at Astbury. After preaching at Chinley, the residence of John Bennet, he states, he preached on "Thursday, Sept. 1, 1748, near Finney Green, at noon; and in the evening near Astbury," no doubt at Thomas Buckley's new residence, which is still standing at the end of Stoney Lane, where the foot-path commences across the fields to Astbury. The house has recently been re-fronted and raised. This seems to have been the last time Mr. Wesley staid at Astbury, henceforth the town presented a more inviting field for his ministry. It is worthy of note, that the work did not begin in many parts of the country as it had done in London, Bristol, and Newcastle, in the very heart of large populations, but in outside and retired localities. This was remarkably the case with this part of the field, which was first entered by John Bennet. Charles and John Wesley were the first who preached the gospel at the Cross, in Congleton; and John Nelson had the honour of introducing Methodism into Manchester by preaching in the street. Whether this was owing to the fact that the early Methodist preachers had no plan by which to guide their movements, simply following the openings of Providence, or to some other cause, it is difficult to say. Some have supposed that they sought retirement to avoid persecution. If this was the case, they failed at Astbury. For on the

occasion of Mr. Wesley's last visit there, a lawless mob, headed by a person known as "Drummer Jack," surrounded the preaching-house, and endeavoured, by the roll of the drum, mock music, and discordant noise, to drown the voice of the preacher, who was addressing the congregation within. Some years after, this said "Drummer Jack" was leading a wedding party to Astbury church, and on reaching the spot where he had been engaged in the unhallowed attempt to disturb the peaceful worship of Almighty God, he suddenly dropped down dead. As his lifeless body was borne through the streets on a ladder, the people of the world, on learning the facts of the case, recognised the retributive hand of Providence.

One of those early visits was remembered by an elder daughter of Thomas's, who, at advanced age, died in peace, at the residence of a younger sister, also a member in this town. She often related the circumstance, and repeated it to Mr. Hadfield, as she lay on her death-bed. She stated that Mr. Wesley was accompanied by his brother Charles, and John Bennet. There were but two beds in the house, and they were fully occupied, as Thomas had then several children. How to accommodate three strangers was, therefore, a matter which called for a little ingenuity ; and was arranged in the following manner. The children were sent to a neighbour's, Charles and Bennet occupied the bed thus left vacant, while John had to stretch his weary limbs on a bed made

on the screen,* with Burkitt's notes for a pillow. Charles having to pass through the room where John, according to his habit, had early retired to rest, found him laughing so heartily as to draw forth a somewhat reproving interrogative.

In 1749 the *Yearly Collection* was instituted, and is therefore one of the oldest funds in our economy. At the Conference of 1749 the enquiry was made,—“How may we raise a general fund? Answer:—By a yearly subscription, to be proposed by every assistant when he visits the classes, at Christmas, and received at the visitation following.” In 1795 it is termed in the Minutes, “The Contingent Fund.” The July collection, commenced in 1815, goes to the aid of this fund. Furnishing aid to the *poor* Circuits, and providing means for the employment of additional Ministers, it might be properly called a “Home Mission Fund.”

* The screen was an ancient piece of furniture, generally made of heavy carved oak, and may still be seen in some old farm-houses. It is superseded by the modern and more elegant sofa.

CHAPTER III.

1749—1761.

Manchester round—The first Conference—Number of circuits in 1746—The first Quarterly Meeting in Cheshire—its financial statement—Peter Jaco's labours and hardships—The early Methodist Preachers went out without purse or scrip—Moral state of the nation—The first society in Congleton—Extent of the Manchester circuit—names of places—List of names of members—The first chapel in Congleton—Mr. Wesley visits Biddulph—Character of its inhabitants.

JOHN BENNET'S extensive round continued to be supplied by himself, and others, whose occasional services he might be able to procure, with a visit, now and then, as it has been seen, from the Wesleys, until Bennet's separation in 1752. From that time it seems to have changed its name, and was called the Manchester round.

"The first Conference was held in London, in the year 1744. It was attended only by six persons, five of whom were clergymen. The societies had spread through various parts of the kingdom; and a number of preachers, under the name of assistants and helpers, the former being superintendents of the latter, had been engaged by Mr. Wesley in the work. Some clergymen, also, more or less co-operated to promote

these attempts to spread the flame of true religion, and were not yet afraid of the cross. These circumstances led to the distribution of the different parts of the kingdom into circuits, to which certain preachers were, for a time, appointed, and were then removed to others. The superintendence of the whole was in the brothers, but particularly in Mr. John Wesley. The annual Conferences afforded, therefore, an admirable opportunity of conversing on important points and distinctions of doctrine, that all might 'speak the same thing' in their public ministrations; and of agreeing upon such a discipline as the new circumstances in which the societies were placed might require. The labours of the preachers for the ensuing year were also arranged; and consultation was held on all matters connected with the promotion of the work of God, in which they were engaged. Everything went on, however, not on a preconceived plan, but 'step by step,' as circumstances suggested and led the way. Everything was subordinated to the great principle of doing good to the souls of men; not excepting even their prejudices and fears, as will appear from the Minutes of the first Conference, which was held in London, as just stated, in 1744. The ultimate separation of the societies from the Church, after the death of the first agents in the work, was at that early period contemplated as a possibility, and made a subject of conversation; and the resolution was, 'We do and will do all we can to prevent those consequences which are supposed to be likely to happen after our death;

but we cannot in good conscience neglect the present opportunity of saving souls while we live, for fear of consequences which may possibly, or probably, happen after we are dead.' To this principle Mr. Wesley was 'faithful unto death,' and it is the true key to his public conduct. His brother, after some years, less steadily adhered to it; and most of the clergymen, who attached themselves to Mr. Wesley in the earlier periods of Methodism, found it too bold a position, and one which exposed them to too severe a fire, to be maintained by them. It required a firmer courage than theirs to hold out such a post; but the founder of Methodism never betrayed the trust which circumstances had laid upon him."*

In 1746, *seven* circuits included nearly the whole of England and Wales :

- 1.—LONDON ; embracing the counties of Surrey and Kent.
- 2.—BRISTOL ; including Somersetshire, Portland, Wiltshire, Oxfordshire, and Gloucestershire.
- 3.—CORNWALL.
- 4.—EVESHAM ; extending to Shrewsbury, Leominster, Hereford, Stroud, and Wednesbury.
- 5.—YORK ; having in its *round*, Yorkshire, Cheshire, Lancashire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, and Lincolnshire.
- 6.—NEWCASTLE.
- 7.—WALES.

From an old circuit book, discovered some years

* Watson.

ago, we learn the important fact, that Manchester was made the head of a *round*, or circuit, so early as the year 1752; and that on the 20th of April in that year, the first Quarterly Meeting was held at Booth-Bank. The following information respecting it, which is contained in the Methodist Magazine for 1843, is furnished by the Rev. G. Marsden.

"Mr. Richard Barlow," he observes, "was one of the earliest Methodists in Manchester, and informed me that he and some other official members of society in the immediate vicinity, determined upon holding a friendly meeting, partly for the transaction of financial affairs, and partly for christian conversation and prayer; and as Booth-Bank, where Ann Crosse resided, was a central place, they agreed to meet there. Friends from different parts of the country assembled; and, pleased with their interview, decided to meet again at the end of the quarter. Their second meeting was held, I believe, in the same place; after which they assembled quarterly in Manchester."

The first entry in the old circuit book contains the financial statement of the meeting; and from this valuable historical record the important fact is elicited, as to the places where Methodism had taken root, and from the amount of the contributions we may fairly infer to what extent the plant had thriven. The quarterly meeting forming one of the most important features in the economy of Methodism, the statement will interest the lovers of Wesleyan lore. It runs thus:

A TRUE ACCOUNT OF THE MONEY BROUGHT IN BY THE STEWARDS FROM EACH SOCIETY IN THE MANCHESTER ROUND, FOR THE USE OF THE PREACHERS, AND FOR THE DISCHARGING OF NECESSARY EXPENSES. *

		£.	s.	d.
Chester	Jonathan Pritchard.....	0	12	0
Alpraham	Richard Cowley	0	12	0
Acton.....	William Davison.....	0	7	0
Booth-Bank	John Crosse... ..	0	10	11
Oldfield Brow	William Johnson.....	0	8	0
Davy Hulme.....	Robert Heywood.....	0	15	0
Shackerley	John Hampson	0	4	0
Bolton	George Eskrick	0	8	2
Bank House	James Scholfield.....	0	8	0
Astbury.....	Jonathan Booth	0	5	6
Manchester.....	Richard Barlow	2	3	5
Kadbrook	Mary Webster.....	0	6	0
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		£7 0 0		
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May 23, 1763, the contributions amounted to £33 12 1

Of Jonathan Booth, the steward from Astbury, no reminiscences remain. John Hampson was one of Mr. Wesley's earliest helpers. Marrying for his second wife an excellent woman who was nearly related to a gentleman of property in the vicinity of Nantwich, he for a time settled there; but frequently visited the societies; and occasionally preached at Manchester, Chester, and other places for many miles round.

* The first Quarterly Meeting ever held in Methodism, was convened at Todmorden Edge, October 18th, 1748; and the first circuit steward was a clergyman of the Established Church, the Rev. William Grimshaw.

Two years after the above date, a superior ministerial husbandman came and sowed the seed of divine truth in this extensive moral field. This was Peter Jaco, who says, "At the Conference held in London, the 4th of May, 1754, I was appointed to the Manchester circuit, which then took in Cheshire, Lancashire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire, and part of Yorkshire. Here God so blessed my labours that I was fully convinced he had called me to preach his gospel. Meantime my hardships were great. I had many difficulties to struggle with. In some places the work was to begin; and in most being in its infancy we had hardly the necessaries of life; so that after preaching three or four times a day, and riding thirty or forty miles, I have often been thankful for a little clean straw with a canvass sheet to lie on. Very frequently we had violent opposition. At Warrington I was struck so violently with a brick on the chest, that the blood gushed out of my mouth, nose, and ears. At Grampound I was pressed for a soldier; kept under a strong guard for several days without meat or drink, but what I was obliged to procure at a large expense; and threatened to have my feet tied under the horse's belly, while I was carried eight miles before the commissioners: and though I was honourably acquitted by them, yet it cost me a pretty large sum of money, as well as much trouble."

Mr. Jaco was the son of a pilchard fisher, at Newlyn, near Penzance; but he had received an education superior to such a position in those times. He possessed

high qualifications for the work of the ministry, but was cut off, almost in the prime of life, at Margate, July 6th, 1781, aged fifty-two years.

For the early Methodist preachers to go forth without purse or scrip was a common practice. Christopher Hopper, on leaving home for the itinerant work says: "I rode to the Smeals, where I parted with my dear wife and friends, with melting hearts and many tears," and then with touching simplicity adds, "In those days we had no provisions made for preachers' wives, no funds, no stewards. He that had a staff might take it, go without it, or stay at home."*

These were extraordinary men—special instruments raised up by the providence of God, and thrust forth to arouse a slumbering nation—collect the smouldering

* In 1764, during the time that William Brammah, who had gone out from Sheffield, was stationed in Cornwall, his wife sold her household furniture, and travelled on foot from that town to Redruth. On her arrival she found her husband at a prayer-meeting, which she joined, and so startled him by her loud responses, that he lifted up his eyes in astonishment, not having had the least intimation of such a visit. "They met after the meeting, but alas! there was not a home to which to take her, no provision having been made for a wife. This lack, however, was soon supplied. Anxious to be useful she went from house to house as she had been wont to do in Sheffield, gathering up backsliders, visiting the sick, and praying with the people in general. Such was the attachment the friends entertained towards her, that a house was provided, several persons uniting and supplying what they could spare of their own different articles of furniture."

embers of decayed piety—strike a spark of heavenly fire in the hearts of thousands—blow it into a flame which should spread throughout the world. At the same time the privations and self-denial—the toils and successes, and the christian magnanimity of these heroic heralds of the gospel, will justly excite the admiration, and claim the gratitude of men, as long as the world endures.

What beneficial effect the preaching of the Methodists had upon the inhabitants of Congleton, at this early period, we are unable to state. Ample proof could be given, if required, to shew that the moral condition of the town was in no respect in advance of that of the nation generally. The Presbyterian or Puritan chapel in this town, like many in different parts of the kingdom, “had lapsed into other hands.” Its pulpit, like their’s, “once familiar with the language of Baxter, Henry, and Owen, gave forth the drowsy tones of the Indifferentist and Socinian.” The church had sunk into dormancy and consequent weakness. “The sordidness and low motives of the parochial clergy destroyed their influence. With the people they had no weight. The condition of the English nation declined with that of her church. There never was in England a period of lower morality—among the people vices abounded; drinking to excess, riot, ignorance, violence, cruelty, the neglect of the poor; our mad-houses a scandal—our prisons a horror; hardly a sign of earnestness or humanity. We wade through these annals, and wonder as we read

them, whether we shall ever again open the records of honesty and worth.”* Such was the nation, and such was this town, when John Wesley and his “helpers” commenced their labours in it.

There is no data to shew the exact time when a society was first formed in Congleton. The earliest notice of a society appears under the date of 1759, seven years after the Manchester round was formed. From some documents which have been preserved by the late Thomas Garside, Esq., we are able to furnish the curious reader with some interesting information. One of these contains a partial list of the names, occupations, and residences of the members of society in the Manchester Circuit in 1759. Unfortunately it is in a mutilated state, several leaves having been torn out at the commencement, and consequently Manchester, Stockport, Macclesfield, and doubtless other places are not in it. The following places are named : —Liverpool, Bolton, Congleton, Biddulph, Old-house-green, Burslem, Little Acton, Hurlstone, Burland, Nantwich, Windy Harbour, Oldersey, Halleyhead, Faddeley, Carden, and Broxton.

At the Conference of this, or the following year, Mr. Thomas Lee was appointed to this circuit. He says of it, that it contained “Lancashire, Cheshire, part of Shropshire, and of Wales, Staffordshire, and part of Derbyshire.” Yorkshire it would seem was now given up, but what the circuit had lost on the

* Colquhoun's Sketches.

one side it had gained on the other, in having added parts of Shropshire and of Wales. This shews, that ninety-seven years ago, the Manchester circuit stretched over no inconsiderable portion of the kingdom ; embracing Bolton in the north, and as is known from other sources, the Peak of Derby in the east, Burslem in the south, and Holywell in Wales westward ; in fact embracing nearly the whole of the ground now occupied by the fifty-six circuits, contained in the Manchester, Liverpool, and Macclesfield districts, having one hundred and thirty ministers, (including those at the Theological Institution, Didsbury,) and 29,508 members.

The subjoined is the list of the names, &c., of the members of society in Congleton in the year 1759 :—

NAME.	STATE.	OCCUPATION.	RESIDENCE.
Sam. Cockerham ...	M ...	Wireworker ...	West St.
Ann Do. ...	M ...		Do.
Mary Davie.....	U ...	Gentlewoman	Do.
Sarah Do.....	U ...	Do.	Do.
Sm. Troutbeck	M ...	Apothecary ...	Mill St.
Ellen Do.	M		Do.
Mary Forster	M ...	Grocer	Town well
Eliz. Do.	M ...	Farmer	Moss side
Sarah Pyat		Spinster.....	Eaton
Sarah Simpson.....		Do.	Summerford
Mary Leigh	M ...	Farmer	Do.
Sarah Toden.....	M ...	Do.	Eaton
Esther Boum.....	W ...		West St.
Ths. Garside	U ...		Mill St.
James Cumberbach	U ...	Shoe-maker....	Do.
Mary Do.	M ...		Do.

NAME.	STATE.	OCCUPATION.	RESIDENCE.
Elizabeth Foster.....	U ...	Silk-weaver ...	Dog Lane
Ann Frost,.....	U ...	Do. ...	Do.
Sarah Hitchings.....			
Mary Braddock	U ...	Ribbon-weaver	Mill St.
Jane Do.	U ...	Do.	Do.
Wm. Stubbs	M ...	Silk-weaver.....	Dog Lane
Mary Do. ....	..	Do.	Do.

BANDS.

MARRIED MEN.	MARRIED WOMEN.	YOUNG WOMEN.
S. Troutbeck	M. Foster	S. Davie
J. Cockerham	E. Troutbeck	M. Braddock
J. Cumberbach	M. Davie	S. Hitchings
T. Garside	C. Bourn	
	M. Cumberbach	
	E. Foster	
	A. Frost	

Eight of the above-named twenty-three persons were new members, and during the succeeding year, 1760, five more were united to the society. Their names were Joseph Booth, Grace Braddock, John Caughton, Matt. Thodern, and Elizabeth Staton. The absence of Thomas Buckley's name from the above list, may be accounted for on the supposition that he was united with, or perhaps the leader of the Old-house-green society. This, however, we are unable to verify; for although there is a ruled page in the Society's book headed "Old-house-green," the names of the society, from some cause or other, are not inserted; or, it is possible, Astbury might have been regarded as a separate society; and the list may have been lost with the missing leaves.

It is well known that Mr. Wesley early divided his societies into *classes*, which form an important branch of the economy of Methodism. "Each class is placed under a person of experience and piety, who meets the others once a week for prayer and enquiry into the religious state of each, in order to administer exhortation and counsel. The origin of these classes was, however, purely accidental. The chapel, at Bristol, was in debt, and it was agreed that each member should contribute one penny a week to reduce the burden. The Bristol society was, therefore, divided into classes; and for convenience, one person was appointed to collect the weekly subscriptions from each class and pay the amount to the stewards. The advantage of this system, when turned to higher purposes, at once struck the methodical and practical mind of Mr. Wesley; he therefore invited several earnest and sensible men to meet him, and the society in London was divided into classes, like that of Bristol, and placed under the spiritual care of these tried and experienced persons." So convinced was Mr. Wesley of the utility and importance of this means of grace, that he made meeting in class a test of membership. Each member was required to meet weekly. *Class papers*, properly ruled and dated were supplied to each leader, for the double purpose of receiving the subscriptions and marking the attendance of the members, and a *ticket* was given as a token of membership, and renewed by the minister at his quarterly visitation. The early tickets were very different from those

now in use. The first series, so to speak, contained emblematical representations only ; one of these emblems was taken from the apocalyptic vision, and represented the angel "flying in the midst of heaven." On the ticket the angel appears with two trumpets, giving the blast right and left, or as Mr. Wesley explains it in his Notes, "breadthways." The next series had texts of scripture and emblems combined, one of which represents an angel flying through the heavens with a winged hour-glass on his head, denoting the rapid flight of time, and an open roll in his hands, bearing this text : "Now is the accepted time." Another contains an open bible, resting on a broad pedestal, and surmounted by a starry crown. The fac-simile of the one opposite speaks for itself. The ground of these tokens of church fellowship is of various colours.

It was about this period that the society in Congleton raised their first chapel, or "*preaching-house*" as they were then termed ; but of this we shall have occasion to speak more at large in a future page.

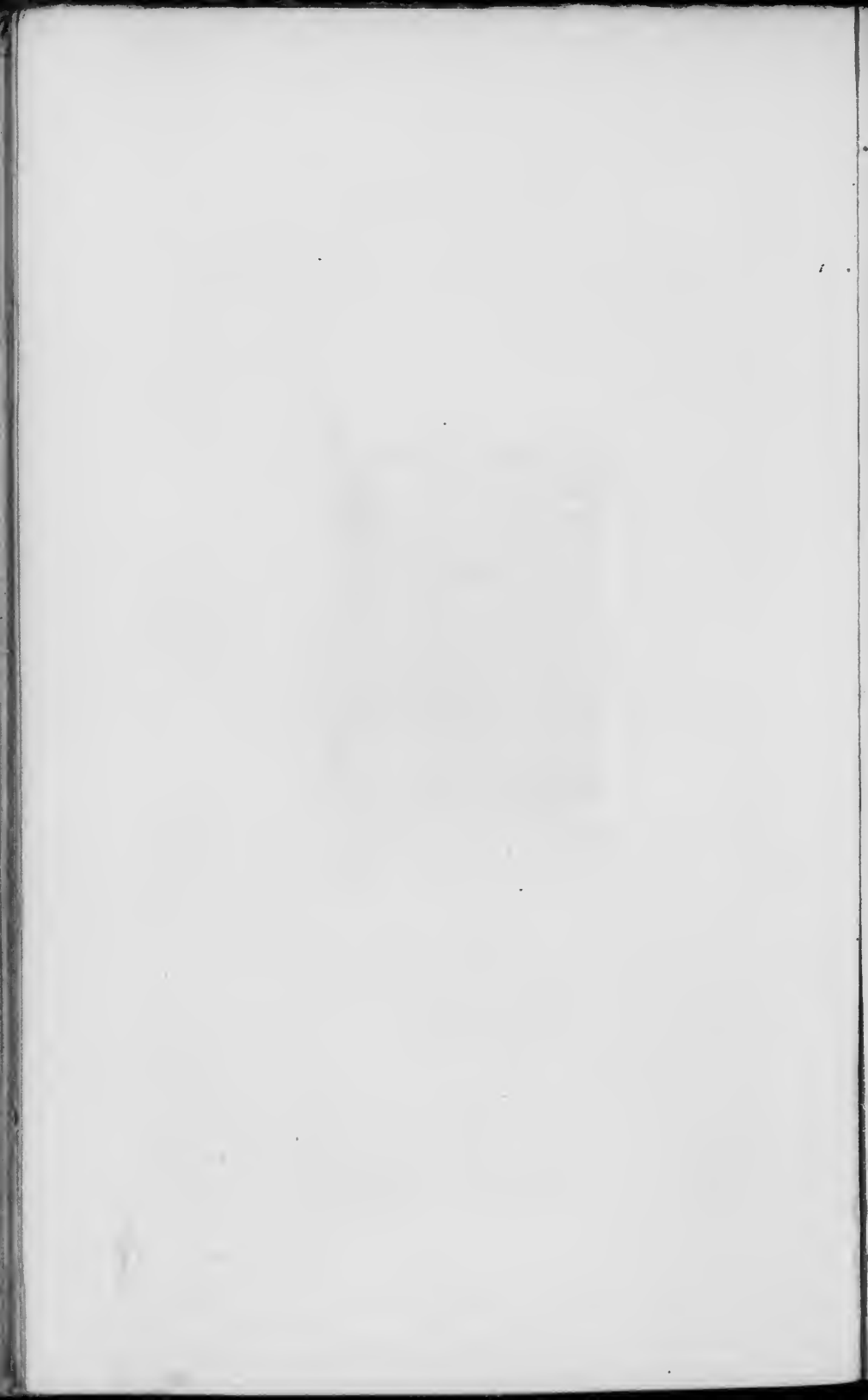
In March, 1761, Mr. Wesley preached at Biddulph and Congleton. Biddulph-Moor, which lies four or five miles east from Congleton, is a hilly and barren district, said to have been originally peopled by foreigners. For the truth of this we do not vouch, but it is certain that there is a peculiarity, even at this day, in the manners and habits of this people which you might seek for in vain in surrounding localities. At the period to which our narrative refers they were

28 July 1762.



Which hope we have for an Anchor of y^e Soul

Thom: Garvidep.



in a state of very imperfect civilization. Any one paying them a visit at that time might easily have imagined that a number of the inhabitants of the sister island had been dropped down on this particular spot. Their dwellings were little better than Irish cabins. Often a cow or two, with a pig or a donkey, found shelter with their owner and his family under the same roof. The earth was their only floor, while lumps of coal were made to supply the place of chairs. At the same time the paucity of their intellectual attainments was as extreme as their moral degradation.

The following fact will speak for itself. It supplies a specimen of the dialect peculiar to the Moor, and will furnish the reader with a better idea of the state of the people in those early times than any merely verbal description. Mr. Cooper, a local preacher, from Cheddleton, beyond Leek, went to preach there one Sabbath-day. On reaching the door of his host he was thus greeted: "Weal Rowbart, we'er fean to see yow. Yar a dacent mon. T'preachers ar sa præd. Come in and we'll put yar tit i't paerlor. Wean had Measter L——, and he fund fau't wa wot wa ginna him to ate. Burt'next tiam hea coems weal broil him a red yearring, and if hea dos 'na like that we'st know he's abauve his measter, for he yate broiled fish." When dinner came to be served up the host said: "Rawbart wean got a piece of meat 'it pot, and its goan so big wa canna get it aat. Wean na foark: wa had a foark wance but aar Ben has lost it." By some means the beef was released from its

imprisonment, and all was getting into readiness for eating operations to be commenced. The knife, however—and it was all the family could boast—had been so long out of use, that it was quite rusty, and Mr. Cooper, waiting until all observers were absent, took it and thrusting it into the mud floor worked it there until something of brightness began to exhibit itself. The reader will not be surprised to learn, that ever afterwards Mr. Cooper provided himself with a pocket knife before commencing his journies to Biddulph-Moor.

A great change has been wrought since then. It will be admitted that there is room—and where is there not?—for improvement, yet much has been done to better the temporal and moral condition of the people. This beneficial result may be ascribed mainly to Methodism, which was introduced at a very early period. Two years prior to Mr. Wesley's visit they numbered sixteen members in society. Their names were,—John and Ann Booth, Joseph and Sarah Turnock, Joseph Turnock, jun., William and Ann Stonier, Mary Winkle, Ellen Winkle, Sarah Winkle, Thomas Booth, William Ball, Richard and Ann Baddiley, Richard Ankers, and James Gibson.

The chapel, which has been recently enlarged and renewed, is now in its interior one of the most elegant little sanctuaries in these parts. Great praise is due to the late Mr. W. Stonier, son of William and Ann Stonier, of the Hurst, for the tasteful improvement effected in the house of God, in which he took a

lively interest, just lived to see it completed, and was then called away to the rest above.

This, or perhaps the preceding year, is memorable in Methodism for the introduction of that important and valuable means of grace, public prayer-meetings. Mr. Matthew Mayer, of Portwood Hall, near Stockport, and John Morris, of Manchester, both young men, established "weekly prayer-meetings," at Davy-Hulme, Duckingfield, Ashton, and other places. As numbers of persons attended these meetings who were utterly ignorant of the things of God, these young men exhorted them to "flee from the wrath to come." The effects were surprising; upwards of sixty persons were awakened and added to the society at Davy-Hulme, in a few weeks after the establishment of these meetings in the village. By this experiment prayer-meetings were found to supply favourable opportunities for exercising the talents of young men, in exhortation and prayer, and of training them for various departments of usefulness in the church. This was so strikingly the case in the present instance, that similar meetings were established in different parts of the kingdom. The blessing that came upon Obededom for receiving the ark of God, seemed to rest upon those families who, unmoved by the violence and execration of the profane, threw open their doors for the instruction and salvation of their neighbours.

"On Sunday evening, while the prayer meeting was in progress at James Wood's the 'heavens were opened,' and great grace rested upon the people.

Many were in distress ; and Morris and Mayer, who conducted the meeting, were completely exhausted by their exertions. Just at this moment, Mr. Robert Costerdine, a local preacher, came into the room. Robert was a sensible man, but not very fond of those meetings, which he looked upon as novelties in Methodism, and not much calculated to promote the calm and steady growth of experimental religion. With some reluctance he engaged in prayer ; and began in his usual slow and deliberate manner. This was but ill-suited to the burning zeal and fervent piety of young Morris ; who kneeling beside him, whispered in his ear, ‘ Brother, if you would fill the house with God you must be more earnest.’ Costerdine elevated his voice, and quickened his utterance, and pleaded in prayer until himself and the people were filled with the Holy Ghost. From that day Robert never looked back, but soon after entered the itinerant ministry, in which he continued twenty-nine years, and lived and died a faithful labourer in his Lord’s vineyard.”

This gracious revival quickly spread all over the Manchester circuit. It produced several gifted and useful ministers, such as Thomas Wood, M.A., Dr. Whitehead, one of the biographers of the venerable Wesley, George Lowe, William Percival, and Matthew Mayer, who, as it has been seen, was one of its first friends, and of whom it is said, “There were few towns, or even villages, in Cheshire, Staffordshire, Derbyshire, the south of Lancashire, or the west of Yorkshire, where there were not many witnesses of

the divine power which attended his preaching. He frequently travelled with Mr. Wesley, was admitted to the annual conference as a confidential friend, and often consulted on the temporal and spiritual affairs of the connexion." *

The subjoined account of this remarkable work of grace is derived from Mr. Wesley's Journal. "Monday, August 2nd, 1762, I rode," says he, "to Chester. Never was the society in such a state before. Their jars and contentions were at an end; and I found nothing but peace and love." After preaching at Northwich, he rode to Manchester. "Here," he proceeds, "I received letters from Congleton in Cheshire, and Burslem in Staffordshire. Part of the former runs thus: August 1st, 1762. 'The work of God for some time stood still here; but at the love-feast, on the twenty-first of March last, (Glory for ever be to God) there was an outpouring of his Spirit among us. Five persons were assured of their acceptance with God, of whom, by his free grace, I was one; four believed he had not only forgiven their sins, but likewise cleansed them from all unrighteousness. Many more have since found him gracious and merciful: nor is his hand yet stayed at all.'"

This blessed work extended to Burslem, where six or seven were justified in a week, while others found the remains of sin destroyed. At Liverpool, as many as nine were justified in an hour, and not less than

* Strachan's Life and Times of the Rev. George Lowe.

fifty-one professed to have attained entire sanctification. Also, at Bolton a similar flame broke out; and at Manchester not less than sixty-three believed that God had cleansed their hearts; while at Macclesfield numbers were awakened and justified, and forty believed that the blood of Christ had cleansed them from all iniquity.

The principal and honoured instrument in this extensive revival, was John Furze, who was born at Sarum, in 1717, and entered on his itinerant labours, not in 1765, as conjectured by Mr. Atmore in his Memorials, but about 1758. His ministerial abilities were not of a high order, but being deeply pious and a stranger to fear, his ministry was remarkably successful, especially in Lancashire and Cheshire. The zeal of this devoted minister kindled a fire, which spread all over this widely extended circuit, so that everywhere "the pleasure of the Lord prospered in his hands." He says of it, that, "It was the most rapid work of God I ever saw. At a love-feast in Manchester, we had eighteen persons justified in an hour, and many experienced a higher work of God, being cleansed from all sin. After deeply hungering and thirsting after righteousness they were satisfied with it. Some of them agonizing in prayer fell to the ground and cried out, 'It is enough Lord! my cup runs over! withhold thy hand, or enlarge my heart!' Our leaders, feeling the weightiness of His presence, and the exceeding greatness of His power, were filled with zeal for the glory of God and the good of souls. They

dispersed themselves on Sundays, went into the the country villages, sang and prayed, and exhorted the people to turn to God. Many came from those villages and great good was done.

“A poor woman, that lived about ten miles from Manchester, hearing some say, ‘We have been there and found the Lord!’ told it to a neighbour, and said ‘I wish I could go to Manchester and find the Lord.’ Her neighbour said, ‘Then why don’t you go?’ ‘Oh dear child I have no shoes!’ was the reply. ‘I will lend you mine,’ said she. ‘Then I will go.’ She came to Manchester on a Sunday, but knew not where to go. Seeing a gentleman walking in the Market-place, she went to him and asked, ‘Where is it that people go to find the Lord?’ He said, ‘Amongst the Methodists as far as I know.’ She asked him, ‘Where are they?’ He answered, ‘Come and I will shew you.’ He brought her to the passage that leads to the preaching-house, and said, ‘go in there!’ She went to the door and enquired, ‘Is this the place where people find the Lord?’ On John Morris, one of the leaders, coming to her she told him all that had happened. He took her in and placed her near the middle of the room, and advised her to look at none but the preacher. She took his advice, and about the middle of the sermon cried out, ‘Glory be to God, I have found the Lord!’ which she did over and over, being filled with joy unspeakable.”

Another remarkable instance of the grace of God in the conversion of two notorious sinners, resident

in Congleton, will be read with lively interest :—
“Two men,” continues Mr. Furze, “were there [Congleton] pot companions, David and Samuel. David made it his business to stand in the street, near the time of preaching, and swear at those that were going in. About this time we had many remarkable conversions. At this he seemed much perplexed, and asked his companion, ‘What can this be? What the d—l is it that they do at the people to convert them? I have a good mind to go and see.’ Accordingly both of them came. But after they had sat about a quarter of an hour, David started up and said, ‘I will stay here no longer.’ He attempted to run, but quickly dropped down. However, he rose, and with some difficulty got home. He went straight to his chamber, and got to bed. He turned himself a few times, then leaped up, saying, ‘I will lie here no longer!’ He ran into the fields, and there wandered up and down all night. In the morning he came home, went into his shop, and thought he would go to work. He heated his iron in the forge, and lifted his hammer over his head, but he imagined the devil was just behind him ready to carry him away. He let fall his hammer, ran out of the shop, went into the fields, where he wandered all day. In the evening, a farmer passed by, and said, ‘David, why are you not at your work? I have been three times at your shop to-day, but you were not to be found.’ David answered, ‘I think I shall work no more!’ The farmer asked, ‘Why so?’ He said, ‘I

am afraid I shall be converted.' It was quickly spread throughout the town that David was going to be converted. But David protested he would not ; he would go and get drunk directly. Accordingly, he went into a public-house, and, with all speed, drank two quarts of ale and half a pint of brandy. Three men sitting by, one of them said, 'David, you will be converted for all this.' David said, 'I will convert thee !' knocked him down, took him by the heels, and threw him out of the door. He did the same to the second and the third. Then he caught up the woman of the house, ran with her into the street, threw her into the kennel, saying, 'Lie thou there !' He went back to the house, tore down the door, broke it in pieces, and threw it into the street. Then he went home, but was no sooner laid down in bed than he thought, 'Now I am sure the devil will have me.' He leaped out of bed, took to the fields, and wandered about all day. At last he went to his companion, and told him, 'Ever since I heard that old fellow preach, I can neither eat nor sleep.' 'Then,' said Sam, 'take it as a warning, or I will keep thy company no more ; else the devil will have us both !' David said, 'Then what shall we do ?' He answered, 'Whatever thou doest, I will join the society.' David fell a weeping, and said, 'If thou doest, so will I, if they will let me.'

"As soon as their design was known, many came running to me, and desired I would not receive either

of them. I said, 'If they come, I will act according to the best judgment I have.' A little before preaching they came. 'Sir,' said Samuel, 'we are a couple of desperate wicked fellows, but we want to be better, and we beg you for Christ's sake to receive us into your society!' I said, 'Yes, for Christ's sake I will receive you.' They looked one at the other with tears flowing from their eyes, and said, 'For Christ's sake receive us now, and let us come in at the love-feast!' I said, 'I do receive you now for Christ's sake.' After preaching, one desired me to look at David. His body was writhed many ways, and his cries and groans were such as struck terror into those that were near him. I kneeled down and prayed; while I was praying David started up, and cried aloud, 'Glory be to God, my sins are forgiven!' At the same time Samuel said, 'O precious Lamb of God, all in a gore of blood for me!' David broke through the people, and caught Sam in his arms, saying, 'Come let us sing the Virgin Mary's song; I could never sing it before, but now my soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit doth rejoice in God my Saviour.'

'Is there a thing too hard for thee,
Almighty Lord of all.'

Of Samuel there seems to be no memorials, but David was known when a grey headed old man. Mr. James Wright, of Siddington, who is now over

eighty, remembers when a young man, walking with him to a *love-feast* * at Macclesfield.

* *Love-feasts* are quarterly meetings of the society. This Christian privilege was enjoyed at first by the *bands* only, but was afterwards opened to the whole society. Bread and water are distributed by the stewards and leaders to each person ; a collection is made for the poor ; as many as are disposed are at liberty to relate their religious experience ; and the meeting is closed, as it was opened, by singing and prayer.

CHAPTER IV.

1764—1782.

Mr. Wesley opposed by the higher classes in Congleton—The chapel noticed—Singular way in which persecution was put down—The readiness with which Mr. Wesley accommodated himself to circumstances—New chapel, Wagg-street—William Stonier and Thomas Garside, Esq., noticed—Extent of the Manchester circuit—Letter from John Pawson—Macclesfield divided from Manchester—Preaching introduced weekly at Congleton—Joshua Staton—Mr. Wesley at Congleton—Sketch of the Rev. David Simpson—Mr. Wesley called away from Congleton to Bristol—The Lime-kilns—Thomas Moor—Mr. Wesley again at Congleton—Division in the Society—Mr. Wesley's notice of it—Burslem made the head of a Circuit.

MR. WESLEY preached at Congleton on Friday, the 20th July, 1764. "At noon," he writes, "we made the same shift at Congleton as when I was here last. I stood in the window, having thrust as many women as it would contain in the house. The rest with the men stood below in the meadow, and many of the townsmen were wild enough. I have scarce found such enlargement of heart since I came from Newcastle. The brutes resisted long, but were at length overcome; not above five or six excepted. Surely man shall not long have the upper hand; God will

get unto himself the victory. It rained all the day till seven in the evening, when I began preaching at Burslem. Even the poor potters here are a more civilized people than the *better sort* (so called) at Congleton. A few stood with their hats on; but none spake a word, or offered to make the least disturbance."

From a statement previously made by Mr. Wesley in his journal, we learn that, at the time of his last visit in March, 1761, the society in Congleton was in possession of its first humble sanctuary. It was erected at the back of Mr. Trotbeck's house, and was entered by a narrow passage from Mill-street. It was the private property of that gentleman, and was most likely rented for the use of the society. On the erection of a new chapel it was turned into cottages, which are still occupied. There is the mark in the wall to which the pulpit was affixed. At that time, the space beyond was an open meadow, where the crowds which the chapel could not contain were in the habit of standing, as related by Mr. Wesley, to hear the gospel embassy as it was announced to them from one of the windows of God's house. There, too, the persecuting mobs assembled to maltreat and annoy the servants of Christ. Sometimes they would kick a football in front of the chapel during divine service, or play a hurdy-gurdy, or beat the drum,—let dogs loose in the midst of the congregation,—hurl dirt, rotten eggs, and other kinds of offensive material. And this was done, not by the baser sort,

but by the (so called) gentlemen of the town. But their reward was at hand. Besides David and Samuel, some others of the persecuting mob were subdued, and won by the truth which at first had awakened their hostile feelings. The career of the rest was brought to a far different termination. It is said, on the authority of that excellent minister, the Rev. G. Lowe, that they were put down in the following singular manner. It seems that at this particular time, a number of unusually tall and powerful men were attracted to the chapel. Being wishful to hear the gospel in peace, and finding that was impossible so long as the mob was allowed to proceed without a check, they determined to take the matter into their own hands, and try the effect of physical force. In order to accomplish their purpose, they concealed themselves, until the unsuspecting mob had collected and commenced their usual annoyance. This was the signal for the assault, out rushed the ambush, and blows began to fall with terrible effect. The astonished rabble, panic-stricken, broke and fled in all directions. So effectual was the lesson thus taught, that they could never be rallied again. In recording this fact, we neither approve of the means employed to quell the mob, nor do we regard the society as at all responsible for the conduct of those Goliaths.

It was not open persecution alone that had to be endured. In those days, the moment a man manifested any religious concern, he was assailed both by

friend and foe. He was denounced as a madman, and in some cases placed under restraint. He became a by-word and a reproach. His society was shunned, or he was treated, like his Lord and Master, as one not fit to live.

The manner in which Mr. Wesley arranged his congregation reminds us of another fact, which demands a passing notice : the readiness with which he accommodated himself to circumstances. The novelty of those circumstances "often, indeed, added to the effect of his sermons. At times he stood on commons and squares, the resort of numbers ; at other times on hill-sides, or quiet nooks, where the picturesque scenery set off, as in a frame, the preacher and his audience. Now, under the summer sky, he preached beneath sycamore-trees. At Gwennap, his favourite place was a natural amphitheatre, where he stood on the top of a wall as a pulpit, the people ranged in rows on the low hills in front. Here, 'in the calm still evening, with the setting sun behind, and an innumerable multitude before, behind, and on either hand,' he preached, and this, he says, was a magnificent spectacle—the sound of ten thousand voices, singing praises in harmony, gave forth a glorious music. At St. Ives his pulpit was the fragment of a rock, ten feet in length, from which the ground descended in a slope to the sea ; there with the waves giving out their low deep under tone, the clear voice of the preacher passed shrill through the multitude. . . . Nature with her elements thus ministered to

his words, and the outward landscape illustrated the thoughts and sermons of the preacher. Wesley's clear voice carried his words to enormous distances. Once he had the ground measured, and found that his voice was heard at a distance of eighty yards. At the age of seventy he preached in the open air to an audience of 32,000, and was heard to the outskirts of the congregation."*

One effect of the revival of the work of God already described was, that the chapel became too strait for the multitudes who were attracted to hear the word of life, and was unsuited to the growing wants of the flourishing society. An eligible site of freehold property being found in Wagg-street, it was secured, and in due time a neat and commodious place of worship was erected upon it. The ground cost £100. The chapel had a gallery at the end and sides, and would seat, it is supposed, about four hundred persons. Mr. Wesley speaks of it in very favourable terms. He says, (March 25th, 1768,) "I turned aside a little to Burslem and preached in the new house. That at Congleton is about the same size, but better contrived, and better finished."

Mr. Wesley also speaks equally favourably of the congregation and society, for he adds, "We had an elegant congregation at Congleton, yet earnestly attentive. It seems the behaviour of the society in this town has convinced all the people in it but the Curate,

* Colquhoun's Sketches.

who still refuses to give the sacrament to any that will not promise to hear these preachers no more."

The subjoined are the names of the trustees of the new chapel :—William Stonier, Thomas Garside, Thomas Cumberbach, John Hughes, John Forster, and James Booth. All but two of these went over to the Calvinists. Of the two trustees that remained, I have been able to gather the following particulars :—

William Stonier was a gentleman of great respectability and wealth, resident at the Hurst in Biddulph. He entered into union with the Methodists at an early period. He was one of the first and a most laborious local preacher in these parts. His labours extended far over the hills beyond Leek, and in the neighbourhood of Buxton, while his services were in frequent demand in Congleton. He had the honour of entertaining Mr. Wesley at the Hurst, on the occasion of his visit to Biddulph. He used to relate the following anecdote of Mr. Wesley. The journey from the Hurst to Congleton, it appears, was performed on foot. At that time the hills over which their path lay, was much more wooded than they are now. Divine influence attended the word which he had spoken on the preceding evening, good had been done, while a gracious effect remained, in a high degree, on his own mind. This was evinced by his animated conversation. Nor did the beautiful scenery through which they were passing escape his notice, or fail to affect his fine sense of the beauties of creation, for when he found himself in the midst of the wooded hills and

valleys, he suddenly stood still, gazed upon the lovely scenery, and then in his fine clear voice, gave out, altering the words to suit the occasion,—

“Break forth into singing, ye trees of the wood,
For Jesus is bringing *Biddulph* sinners to God.”

Thomas Garside, Esq. sen., was not only one of the earliest Methodists in this town, but also a class-leader, and was most active and influential in his endeavours to promote the cause which he had espoused. For many years he resided nearly opposite the chapel in Wagg-street, where he frequently entertained Mr. Wesley, Dr. Coke, and many of the first and second race of preachers. Generous and large-hearted, his house was always open to the ministers of Christ, who never failed to find a welcome home under his hospitable roof. Following the advice of the apostle, and being “not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord,” he found “godliness to be profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” He rose into easy circumstances, became a member of the Corporation, and was elected to the mayorship in 1792. Such was the integrity and uprightness of his character that it won general esteem. He was one in whom all could confide. He was a faithful member of the church, and ever manifested a laudable interest in the prosperity of Zion. After serving his generation for many years, his constitution, which was naturally strong, at length suddenly gave way, and after suffer-

ing severe pain with patient submission, he fell asleep in Jesus, on March 24th, 1798.

At the Leeds Conference of 1766, John Pawson, Peter Jaco, Paul Greenwood, and John Allen, were appointed to the Manchester circuit. "Our circuit," says the first-named minister, "was very extensive, as it took in Stockport, Macclesfield, Congleton, Newcastle, Warrington, Liverpool, Bolton, and many other towns. At the conclusion of the second year," he says, "we found we had added four hundred and thirty souls to the society, and there was good reason to believe that above two hundred had found a clear sense of the love of God." Here then we have evidence that the revival was still in progress.

During the two years that Mr. Pawson spent in the Manchester circuit, he seems to have been much attached to the society in Congleton ; and a friendship sprung up between him and Mr. Garside which was kept up by subsequent correspondence. The following letter of Mr. Pawson's, to Mr. Garside, has a bearing on the state of the society :—

"Stourbridge, May 26th, 1769.

"I suppose by this time you begin to think that I have entirely forgotten you, as I have delayed writing so long ; my reason is, I frequently hear of you by one or another who comes this way, and I suppose you do the same. It gave me a good deal of satisfaction to learn from your letter, that you were determined, through grace, to press forward. Yes my brother, this is undoubtedly the way at all

times, let our trials be of what kind, or come from what source they will. I am quite certain, that it is possible for you and me to live near to God, and to walk unblameably before him, when storms and tempests beat upon us. I know that it is exceedingly grievous to see the work of God on the decline, as one and another turns aside. Yet though greatly grieved, we must strive to make the best of it, by cleaving to God with full purpose of heart. This has indeed been a trying year with you, and many times I have been exceedingly concerned on your account. I hope our gracious Lord will remember you for good, and send you those that will come in the fulness of the blessings of Christ. Oh, pray much that this may be the case. I was exceedingly glad to hear that Brother Forster was still among you ; my very heart rejoiced to think that the devil had not quite separated him from his brethren. I can give no particular reason for it, but I have always found a very great regard for him, and at the same time, I have thought he stood in great danger of being betrayed by the devil into some of his former sins. May the Lord continually keep him ! So now Brother Cockerham is safely landed ! Well, he has scarcely left us behind. Poor Nanny is left in a widowed state indeed, but God will still fulfil his promise, and be a ' Father to the children, and a husband to the widow.' I still find by happy experience that it is good for me to serve the Lord. Heaven stands full in view to draw us on, and hell

behind to drive us forward. Give my love to your dear partner, to James, and Molly, to Mr. and Mrs. Trotbeck, to J. Hughes and family, to J. Forster, N. Cockerham, to Joseph Luke, and all friends.

“Your affectionate Brother,

“J. PAWSON.”

The first complete connexional return of members was made in 1767, being 25,911.

In 1770, Macclesfield was separated from Manchester, and made the head of a circuit, embracing Congleton, Burslem, Leek, Nantwich, Buxton, and other places. The circuit extended eastward into the peak of Derby, where it joined the Sheffield circuit.*

Our information respecting the division of the circuit is derived from the Memoir of Mr. R. Costerdine, (written by himself,) and published in the Methodist Magazine for March, 1814. He says (p. 116,) “I spent one year at Manchester with Mr. Mather; we laboured together in love and with some success.” In turning to the Minutes of Conference for 1769, we find the following appointment. “Lanca-

* The writer has heard some of those old stalwart, woodland shepherds, speak of carrying the old preachers on their backs through the snowdrifts, which used to choke the roads in winter. Sometimes a preacher has been seen with a spade strapped on the saddle behind, when taking his departure from Macclesfield for that bleak portion of the circuit; the spade being deemed needful to cut a way for man and horse through the drifts of snow.

shire, South," which Mr. Costerdine calls Manchester, "Alexander Mather, Robert Costerdine, George Story." He proceeds, "The year after I was appointed for the Macclesfield circuit, it being then separate from Manchester, and the blessing of God attended our labours. Leek was taken into the circuit this year." It seems difficult to say to what circuit Leek belonged at the time it was united to Macclesfield, unless it continued to form a part of the Birmingham circuit, with which it was originally incorporated.*

It is probable that, previous to this date, Congleton was supplied with preaching only once a fortnight. By calling in the aid of several local preachers who were raised up about this time, it was introduced weekly, on the Sabbath, at eight in the morning, and at five in the evening; followed generally, when the "travelling preachers" were there, with a sermon at five o'clock on Monday morning. There was also preaching once a fortnight on a Thursday evening.

In 1771, John Shaw, Samuel Smith, and Thomas Tatton, were appointed to this newly-formed circuit. On Sabbath morning, Aug. 25th, Mr. Smith opened his commission at Congleton by preaching from, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God," &c., Matt. vi. 33; and in the evening from, "Is there no balm in Gilead," &c., Jer viii. 22. In a fortnight after came Mr. Tatton, and preached from, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian," Acts xxvi. 28; and in the evening

* See Methodism in Leek.

from : "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation," Heb. ii. 3. Sunday morning, September 22nd, brought Mr. Shaw, who addressed the congregation from : "Take heed to yourselves," Luke xvii. 3 ; and in the evening from : "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us," 1 John iv. 16 ; and again, on Friday evening, from : "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," 1 John i. 9.

The character of these passages of Scripture will enable us easily to infer what was the nature of the doctrines taught by those ministers of Christ, at that comparatively early period. They were too earnest to be speculative ; too deeply affected by the truths which they announced to be other than experimental and practical.

A Mr. Robert Johnson, Mr. Bredin, and John Hampson, occasionally preached at Congleton ; and Mr. Matthew Mayer, of Stockport, frequently, both on the Sabbath and week-day. Thus, the vacant Sabbath was supplied with preaching by these "helps," which have ever formed an important feature in the Wesleyan economy.

The earliest and most distinguished of these were, William Stonier, of the Hurst, Biddulph, (of whom a notice will be found in a former page,) and Joshua Staton, of Congleton. On September 3rd, Joshua—then a young man, and but just commencing his pulpit efforts—held forth the word of life from : "But ye

are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God," 1 Cor. vi. 11; and in the evening from the Saviour's solemn declaration: "He that believeth, and is baptised, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned," Mark xvi. 16. Joshua was neither tall nor portly in person, yet somewhat magisterial and precise in his manner; of few words; but highly esteemed both as a class-leader and local-preacher. That his services were acceptable is evident from the fact, that during the year 1772 he occupied the pulpit more than one half of the Sabbaths left vacant by circuit ministers. At that time there was no such a thing as a circuit plan. The few local-preachers that there were supplied the appointments which were given to them by the superintendent, and then struck out a course for themselves, entering every providential opening near at hand or more distant.

It is said that Joshua Staton used to walk to the quarterly meeting at Manchester, before the division of the circuit, taking ten shillings as the quarterage from this part. The following anecdote is told of him:—Joshua had a taste for music, and was the leader of the singers. A dispute arose between him and an official person as to the correct mode of singing a certain tune. Being unable to come to an agreement, it was resolved to appeal to Mr. Wesley, whose critical taste and fine ear for music is well known. When Mr. Wesley arrived, the case was brought before him, and Joshua was required to sing

the tune. Mr. Wesley listened with attention, and when it was finished turned to the singer and said, "Joshua you are right: you have sung the tune quite correctly." A musical talent still remains in the family, Mr. William Staton, grandson of Joshua, is the leader of the choir at the present time.

On Wednesday, March 25th, 1772, Mr. Wesley thus speaks of the good cause in this town:—"We went on to Congleton, where all is now peace and love. None is now left to speak against the Methodists, except Mr. Sandbach,* the curate. He earnestly endeavours to drive them away from the church, but they will not leave it yet. They love both the liturgy and her doctrine, and know not where to find a better." In the evening Mr. Wesley's text was: "And it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment," Heb. ix. 27; and on the following morning: "There is none like the God of Jeshurun," &c., Deut. xxxiii. 26—29. On the Thursday evening his discourse was founded on Matt. vii. 13, 14: "Enter ye in at the strait gate," &c.; and on the Friday morning he preached from: "Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice," 1 Kings xviii. 38, 39.

* The Rev. R. Sandbach seems to have been contumacious in his disposition, for he was not only quarrelsome with the Methodists, but brought himself under the ban of the corporation, by whom he was removed from the curacy. Justice requires us to state, that it is said, that on his removal to London, he became a changed character, and acted more in harmony with the sacredness of his profession.

About this period the Rev. David Simpson came to reside in Macclesfield. He was one of the few clergymen who deeply sympathised with Mr. Wesley, and not only rejoiced in his success, but largely contributed to it, in Macclesfield, and the adjacent towns and villages. He was "a burning and shining light;" and his ministry was popular and useful to an extraordinary degree. The new church, which was built by C. Roe, Esq., purposely for him, was crowded to excess, by a deeply devout audience, many of whom regularly travelled from four to ten miles to hear him. He frequently preached in the neighbouring villages, in the churches, if accessible, but if closed against him, in cottages or in the open air. Hundreds were convinced of sin, and not a few found their way to the Methodist class. "As Methodism spread, he gradually abridged his labours. Conversing one day with a friend, he observed, 'my health will no longer allow me to follow my former plan, nor is it now necessary, as the Wesleyan preachers are received in all those villages, and have formed societies.'" His heart was the seat of the truest catholicity, and, with his house, was generally open to the Methodists and the members of all other branches of the evangelical church. After the exhausting labours of the morning and afternoon services in his own church, he would send off his family to the Methodist chapel in the evening, and bye and bye he would follow them, and quietly take his place in some retired part, and devoutly join the congregation in the worship of Almighty God. The end of this

devoted minister was in perfect keeping with his life. "A few days before he died, he said, 'Tell the people that their pastor is not dying in the dark! No, blessed be God! I have a glorious hope, blooming, and full of immortality. I know that my Redeemer liveth. He is precious to my soul: I feel his divine consolation. I wish I were able to utter all I feel. All is well! all shall be well!' About three thousand people attended his funeral, and even little children followed him to the grave weeping. The scene was deeply affecting, and the sentiment of the poet seemed to actuate every spectator,—

'He was a man, take him for all in all,
We ne'er shall look upon his like again.'

There is a circumstance connected with Mr. Wesley's next call at Congleton, which illustrates his extraordinary power of physical endurance; and shows how Providence had adapted the body, as well as the mind, of this extraordinary man, for the great work to which he devoted himself. "*Wednesday*, 30th March, 1774, I went on," he states, "to Congleton, where I received letters, informing me that my presence was necessary at Bristol. So about one I took chaise, and reached Bristol about half an hour after one the next day. Having done my business in about two hours, on *Friday* in the afternoon I reached Congleton again; (about a hundred and forty miles from Bristol;) no more tired (Blessed be God!) than

when I left it. What a change is in this town ! The bitter enmity of the towns-folks to the Methodists is clean forgotten. So has the steady behaviour of the little flock turned the hearts of their opposers."

During Mr. Wesley's absence in Bristol, his place was supplied by Mr. Boardman, who preached on the Wednesday evening (after his departure) from : "Fear not ye ! for I know that ye seek Jesus, who was crucified." A Mr. Sanders preached twice on Thursday, and again on the following morning, which was Good-Friday. That afternoon Mr. Wesley returned, and notwithstanding the fact, that, saving the two hours, occupied in the business which had called him to Bristol, he had been on the wheels, nearly the whole of the time since he left Congleton at noon on Wednesday, he preached in the evening. But would he not require, it might very naturally be asked, a little extra rest after such incessant fatigue ? From a memorandum which is in the possession of the writer, he is able to say No ! and to state, that this extraordinary man was again preaching, at the early hour of five on the following morning ; and also at the same hour on the Sabbath morning, being Easter-Sunday, after which he attended the old church at Macclesfield ; and preached to his own people at night. Thus pursuing his usual course, " Many fall around him, younger and stronger men. Age grasps his contemporaries and breaks them into decrepitude. He stands erect in his slight but sinewy frame, and looks forty years their junior. His recipe is, to rise at four

o'clock, to preach at five in the morning, and to travel (chiefly on horseback) four thousand five hundred miles in the year."

Hester Ann Roe, afterwards Mrs. Rogers, joined the society in Macclesfield in 1774.

We must now notice the extension of the work. One of the oldest societies next to those of Old-house-green, Astbury, and Congleton, was at the Lime-kilns. Preaching was conducted for many years at the house of Mr. Shaw, where a class was met by William Handcock, and afterwards for many years at Mr. Cheshires. The society is now merged in that at Congleton-Edge, where there is a small chapel to which the preaching has been removed.

Mr. Charles Shaw, one of the oldest members of society in the circuit, and a leader at Congleton-Edge, gives the following account of the conversion of two of his relatives. Mrs. Handcock, one of his aunts, was led to hear the Methodists at the Lime-kilns, and then joined the society there. Shortly after that event she was taken ill, and was visited by a younger and unconverted sister, of the name of Bailey. The afflicted sister, full of the joy of a conscious salvation, began most earnestly to address the younger on the momentous subject of personal religion; and then proposed prayer in her behalf. Feeling no disposition to be brought to such close quarters, she was about to make her escape, when the other seized her dress, and almost forced her to kneel, and then wrestled in prayer so mightily with God in her behalf as to

prevail. The sister's heart was touched, she wept, prayed, believed, and 'ere she rose from her knees, was enabled to sing,—

“No condemnation now I dread ;
Jesus, and all in him, are mine.”

For a time, she walked in the light of God's countenance, but afterwards sank into a gloomy state of despondency. Unbelieving fears gained such a mastery over her, that she suffered the deepest dejection. In this state of mind she had one day been collecting eggs, and was in the act of crossing the farm-yard, wrestling mightily with her invisible foe, and being driven from her last refuge, the cross,—the dark cloud of despair was settling in horror on her soul. Her mental sufferings were heightened to an agony, and seizing an egg, she exclaimed as she dashed it against the wall of the barn, “I shall be damned as sure as that egg is broken.” To her astonishment the egg rebounded from the wall and rolled up the yard uninjured. This remarkable circumstance broke the snare of the enemy. Despair gave place to confidence, and her mourning was once more turned into joy.

Mrs. Bailey resided at Pool farm, between the one formerly occupied by Thomas Buckley, and Astbury. She and her husband were members of society many years. A class was met in their house, and they had preaching occasionally. On these occasions she manifested a lively zeal in the welfare of her neighbours, by going from door to door and informing them of

the time and place of preaching. She made strenuous efforts to introduce the gospel into the village, but the people did not appreciate the attempt. Her endeavours to do good were kept up till she reached her seventieth year, when growing infirmities confined her more to her own habitation. Her end was peace.

Shortly after this period, a young man of the name of Thomas Moor was induced, at the solicitation of Mr. Shaw, senior, to attend the preaching at the Limekilns. Thomas was deeply affected by the truth—speedily joined the class, and afterwards became its leader, and also a very laborious and acceptable local-preacher. He had a moral field of some extent, for a time at least, under his almost exclusive culture. Beginning at his own residence at Congleton-Edge, it extended to Mow-cop, Harriseahead, Lawton, and other parts of Cheshire and Staffordshire. The great extent of the circuit rendered it impossible for the three regular ministers to do more than visit the principal towns in it, with a few old established country places. The intermediate ground, studded with villages and hamlets, afforded an ample field of labour for such spiritual husbandmen as Thomas Moor, whose labours have been made a blessing to many. The energetic and pointed preaching of this zealous man seems to have been much owned of God in the conversion of sinners. Perhaps the most important of these was that of Miss Harrison, of Wheelock. By one that repeatedly heard him, it is remarked, “that his style and matter were finely adapted to the state and capacity of his hearers.” He was suddenly cut off by fever

in the midst of his usefulness, and in the prime of manhood. His funeral sermon was preached by Jeremiah Brettell, in Mr. Shaw's orchard.

During a tour which Mr. Wesley made through the societies in 1777, to procure aid towards the expenses of the new chapel, (City-road,) he called at Congleton, and once more proclaimed the gospel from the prophetic enquiry, "Shall a nation be born in a day?" Also about the same date in the two succeeding springs, he renewed his visits and his services.

The Arminian Magazine was commenced in 1778.

One of the principal coach roads passing through Congleton gave the friends a frequent opportunity of securing the occasional services of some of the more distinguished ministers, who might happen to be passing through. Thus, we find Alexander Mather preaching on Thursday, June 3rd, 1779, from Hebrews iv. 11., and on Wednesday evening, August 18th, Dr. Coke preached from the parable of the "great supper," Luke xiv. 16, 17; also on the following morning. The doctor was followed by Christopher Hopper, Joseph Benson, R. C. Brackenbury, and others.

On Sunday, October 25th, 1782, the Rev. David Simpson, exemplifying in an eminent degree the spirit of the Evangelical Alliance, preached in the Methodist chapel morning and evening, and again on the Monday evening.

The year 1782 is memorable for the first division which split the society in this town. The circumstances which led to it were these:—The Rev. John Scott, a Calvinist minister, formerly a sea captain,

being on a preaching excursion, came to Congleton. An application was made by his friends for the use of the Methodist chapel, but they met with a refusal. This being the case, he took his stand in front of the chapel, and preached in the open air. Meeting with encouragement he repeated his visits. At the close of one of his out-door services, he informed his hearers, that the next time they might expect a baron and knight to preach to them. This was Richard Hill, who, with his brother Rowland (who also visited Congleton,) were notorious in their younger days for their bitter opposition to Mr. Wesley, and his triumphant vindicator John Fletcher. The refusal to admit Mr. Scott into the chapel gave great offence to some of the members of society, who carried the affront to such an extent, that on the formation of a Calvinist cause, they united with it; and thus, with their families, withdrew at once and for ever from the people amongst whom they had professedly received their first good. Amongst these were the Cockerhams, Cumberbaches, Greens, and others. Mr. Scott afterwards erected the Mill-street chapel. In Mr. Wesley's Journal, we find the subjoined notice of this unhappy rent :—"Thursday, March 28th, 1782," he writes, "coming to Congleton, I found the Calvinists were just breaking in, and striving to make havoc of the flock. Is this brotherly love? Is this doing as we would be done to? No more than robbing on the highway. But it is decreed and they cannot help it: so we cannot blame them."

Happily, a brighter day has dawned, and the vision of the prophet is being realized, "The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim."

At the Conference of this year another important event took place which marks the progress of the cause: the division of the Macclesfield circuit, when Burslem, having Leek in connexion with it, was made the head of a new circuit. The Lime-kilns, Biddulph-Moor, and Bradley-Green were included in the new circuit, and Congleton became the southern limit of the old one. Mr. James Rogers gives the following account of the division:—"In the year 1782 I was appointed for Macclesfield. As the circuit was large and unwieldy, four preachers were sent, with instructions to divide it. We did this in the best manner we could; my worthy colleague, Mr. Myles, took charge of the Burslem division. But this, with some other amendments, such as furnishing the preacher's dwelling-house by subscription, changing the stewards, &c., gave deep offence to a few individuals; but the hearts of the people were united to their preachers; and notwithstanding all the difficulties we met with, we were greatly comforted among them, and at the end of two years, I had the satisfaction of leaving them considerably increased in number; and I trust, upon the whole, not less alive to God than I found them."

CHAPTER V.

1783—1787.

The ease with which Mr. Wesley adjusted differences—Mr. Wesley's labours at Congleton made a blessing to Mr. J. Booth—State of the Society—Mr. Wesley passes through on his way to and from Ireland—Introduction of Methodism into Sandbach—Conversion of Miss Harrison, of Wheelock—Growth of the Society—Letter—Commencement of the work at Withington—Bigotry—Persecution—Myles Martindale stopped on the way—Mr. Allen's visit to Dingle Smithy—His life placed in jeopardy—A buffoon abashed—Awful end of the persecutors—Mr. Wesley's nineteenth visit to Congleton—Mr. Troutbeck and Mrs. Guilford.

THE ease with which Mr. Wesley adjusted differences, small or great, was truly remarkable. His enlightened and penetrating intellect, guided by the grace of God, enabled him to see, as by an intuitive glance, the proper course to be pursued; and he acted with a promptitude and decision which none but a man of singleness of purpose could have done. His only aim being to guide souls in the way to heaven, he sedulously endeavoured to collect and feed the flock committed to his care. Hence, being looked up to by his people with a feeling similar to that by which a father is regarded in the midst of his family, his authority met with deference from all

parties ; and his administration of discipline was generally successful. In this respect John had the pre-eminence. Charles “ brought to him affectionate sympathy, earnest preaching, and a popular minstrelsy. He wrote the hymns which ministered to the delight of the societies, and still fill their collections ; but which have also passed into other hands, and have given comfort and instruction to many hearts. The sustaining impulse of the movement, however, came from John Wesley. The bone and sinew of the sect were in him. His brother was tender, imaginative, and impressive. John Wesley alone had the qualities which rule mankind. Courage and decision he had beyond ordinary men ; and he was often called upon to exercise these.” Take an instance. It is not one to which any great importance can be attached, and yet in unskilful hands it might have assumed a serious aspect, and resulted in disastrous consequences. Mr. Wesley was as remarkable for preventing, as for correcting, disorder. The “ deep offence ” which certain parties took at the division of the circuit, and other matters, could not be settled without an appeal to Mr. Wesley, who thus refers to it : “ I rode to Congleton. I had received abundance of complaints against the assistant of this circuit, (Macclesfield,) James Rogers. Saturday, August 30. I heard all the parties face to face, and encouraged them all to speak their whole mind. I was surprised : so much prejudice, anger, and bitterness, on so slight an occasion, I never saw. However, after they had

had it out, they were much softened, if not quite reconciled."

The benefits accruing from Mr. Wesley's labours on this occasion were not confined to the society, but were shared by a person from a distant part of the circuit. This was Mr. John Boothby, of Kettleshulme. He speaks of it thus : " I was one of the first members of society in Kettleshulme, which has now stood twenty-four years, and from which have sprung several other societies in the neighbouring villages. For twenty years only six persons of our family were in connexion ; however, I had confidence that the Lord would bring them all in ; but ' hope deferred maketh the heart sick.' I began to be discouraged, and almost left off praying for them. But my confidence again revived on hearing a discourse of Mr. Wesley's at Congleton, on raising the ruler's daughter, and which he applied to the conversion of our relations. The exhortation particularly affected me, ' Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.' And I bless God he has answered my prayers, and given me to see the desire of my soul, in the conversion of many of our family. My wife and seven children, and sixteen other near relatives, are now in society ; besides some who are gone to their everlasting rest."

The bad effects of the misunderstanding of the previous year were visible, when Mr. Wesley, in his annual visitation of the societies, called at Congleton. He thus alludes to it :—" Wednesday, March 31st,

1784. I did not find so lively a people at Congleton. Although the wounds made by prejudice are nearly healed, yet a faintness and deadness remained. I found," he continues, "the same sad effects of prejudice at Macclesfield: but there are so many here truly alive to God, that his work goes on still; only not in so rapid a manner as it might otherwise have done." In the following spring, however, things wore a more improved and pleasing aspect. The clouds had passed away—the dews of Divine grace had descended—and Zion once more flourished in verdure and beauty. Concord reigned, and the pious looker-on could exclaim, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" This may be inferred from Mr. Wesley's Journal, when he says:—"Wednesday, March 30th, 1785, I was greatly comforted amongst our brethren at Burslem, well established in grace; and such another congregation I met with, Thursday 31st, at Congleton."

In April, 1786, Mr. Wesley just names Congleton, and then proceeds to state, "I came on to Macclesfield. Here again I had the satisfaction to find a people much alive to God. Sunday, 2nd. We had a large and serious congregation at the new church, both morning and afternoon. The organ is one of the finest toned I ever heard; and the congregation singing with it make a sweet harmony." After visiting Ireland, Mr. Wesley returned by way of Liverpool, Manchester, and Congleton.

There can be no doubt, that, after the separation of Burslem from Macclesfield, the ministers in the latter endeavoured to enlarge their now, somewhat, contracted sphere of labour, at least on the southern and western borders. It is probable *Sandbach* was taken into the circuit about this time. In this, as in a multitude of other cases, a solitary traveller might have been seen entering the town. Plain but peculiar in his external appearance, he attracts attention. His countenance is placid but thoughtful, while the fearless look of his eye and the firmness of his step, indicate a mind influenced by decision of purpose. He makes his way to the market place—takes his stand on the ancient cross—curiosity is excited—some persons collect around him, while others look on from their open doors or windows—a few lines of a hymn are sung by him in a clear and earnest manner—this is followed by importunate prayer, supplicating a present salvation for the people before him. An awful sense of the nearness of Jehovah, and a painful consciousness of guilt is felt by some of those listeners, producing in them emotions to which previously they have been strangers, so that for the moment they have been ready to exclaim: “Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all my transgressions.” Now a plain text from the book of God is announced, and the word of the Lord is dealt out like the blows of a hammer; or like the thrust of a sword, aimed at the heart, it pierces and lays open the depravity of the inner man. This is more than the unsubdued carnal

mind can bear, so that some, as in the days of the apostle, begin to "gainsay"—others to mock; while those of the baser sort, breaking through all restraint, commence an assault by hurling every kind of offensive missile on which they can lay their hands; and the church bells are rung, to drown the speaker's voice. Undismayed, however, by the storm that rages around him, the preacher continues to scatter the barbed arrows of Divine truth; and by the blessing of God they find a sure lodgment in some hearts; and although many persons resist, others yield. One man, at least, on an occasion like this in Sandbach, felt the word to be a message from God to him, and resolved to brave the scorn of his townsmen and open his house for the preacher and his hearers. This was Thomas Mann, a dyer, who resided at the house (still a dye-house) on the right hand side of the London road, beyond the bridge. Here a small society was raised. In the early part of the year 1785, it was greatly strengthened by the addition of Miss Harrison of Wheelock. Miss Harrison was a strict churchwoman, but at the solicitation of a pious female servant who was a member of the little class at Sandbach, she was induced to hear the Methodists. The preacher was Thomas Moor. The word came in "demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Miss Harrison was stripped of all her Pharasaical notions—deeply convinced of sin, and brought to instant decision to seek the salvation of her soul. These gracious impressions were deepened under a discourse which she heard from

Joseph Bradford, and to which in a letter to Mrs. Pimlott, of Macclesfield, she thus alludes : " I heard Mr. Bradford (February, 1785) with profit. He met the society, and desired any seriously disposed person to remain ; you may be sure I should be one of the last to go. Mr. Bradford asked me many questions, and amongst others, if I should like to join the society ? I said I should, but it was not agreeable to my family. I will put my trust in one that will not deceive me, and if I do join, by God's grace, I will not disgrace the people of my choice." Miss Harrison did join the society, and thereby incurred the displeasure of her parents. But after meekly bearing persecution for the truth's sake, she had the gratification of seeing her mother become first a hearer, and then with other branches of the family, a member of the class.

In 1785-6 the society numbered twenty members, and was in a prosperous state. Miss Harrison thus speaks of it :—" We have sweet meetings, particularly at class. I hope those who have not believed with their hearts unto righteousness, are in good earnest to be able to call Jesus Lord, by the Holy Ghost. James Tomkinson was justified last Sunday night, after which we went to see his sister, who is on her death-bed, but happy in the love of God. The man whom William Stinson went to see (of whom I told you) died about three weeks after, rejoicing in God his Saviour." This last remark may remind us of the thousands upon thousands, who through the instrumentality of Methodism—acting

like a vast benevolent society—have been rescued from ignorance, spiritual bondage, and death, while lying on a bed of sickness. The decision of purpose, the plodding practical piety, and the simple unaffected dependence upon the blessing of God, which ensures success, and which was so highly characteristic of the early Methodists, present a fine example to their successors.

We give the subjoined extract as evidence of the spiritual state, of at least some, of the members of society, and with the hope that it may stir some up to a closer walk with God. “A visit to Miss Cliffe (writes the same lady) was profitable. She seems to possess much of the mind of Christ, and is earnestly pressing after more. Kitty Smith was there : may I not say her heart is all devotion, and all her passions love. Since then I have been in the company of Miss Clulow, of Macclesfield. She is not nineteen years of age. She said, there was not a moment in the day when her mind was not stayed on God. How I do admire those that excel in virtue, and how good it is to be with them.”

At first, in most places, preaching—as is well known—was by no means regular. A sermon now and then, was all the societies could depend upon. The supply—and how precious it was—came like fitful showers on the thirsty ground. But as a place prospered, and thus grew in importance, more attention was given to it ; and now by the blessing of God, in raising up men and means, the supply in

most cases has become ample and constant as the flow of a well-fed river. It is an interesting feature in this great revival, that while its prosperity created the demand, it also furnished the supply. The evangelists, pastors, and various office-bearers, and ordinances in Methodism, have not come from without, but have sprung from within, and have been nourished in her own bosom.

Sandbach furnishes an illustrative instance. For some years, at first, preaching was occasional, but in 1792 it became weekly on the Sabbath, with a sermon about once in two months by the regular ministers on the week-day. An extract from the same correspondence will throw light on the state of the cause under this date. "You wish to know (she says in a letter to Mrs. Pimlott) how we are getting on at Sandbach. It is with pleasure that I inform you, that we now have preaching every Sabbath, at one o'clock at noon. We have very acceptable preachers—many hearers, and great attention is paid to the word ; which is, indeed, with power from on high. Dark minds are enlightened—mourners comforted—the feeble strengthened, and several have been brought into the society. Amongst these, are Thomas Eaton and his wife. His brother John, and his father-in-law, believe that God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven them their sins. I believe the society is walking pretty steadily. On the 16th instant, Mr. Denton was at Sandbach, and that day two months we are to receive our tickets. You may expect me

to say something of our family. The Lord is carrying on a good work in my dear mother. She has a broken and contrite heart, and if she could but believe she certainly would see the salvation of God. Sister Ann is going forward, but I am sorry to say David is only a seeker, and does not strive to enter in. Benjamin is going on." Here we see five persons in this one family—the mother, three children, and a servant man (and to these must be added, the father, who also became a member), all travellers to, or on the high way of holiness. And may not this blessed work be ascribed, instrumentally at least, to the faithfulness and consistency of that maid servant, who first carried the leaven of Methodism into their dwelling? We are reminded of the "little maid" of Israel, whose pious wish brought such a boon to her master Naaman, and through him to his household and country. Nor can we withhold the reflection, that, when we consider what a large proportion of the community domestic servants form—the position they occupy—the intimacy they acquire, and the influence they exert for comfort or discomfort—for weal or woe in the families where they live, it will be felt that they cannot be too well trained for the duties of their station, and that the value of true piety in them is above all price.

Thomas Eaton fell away, but his brother John remained steadfast, and after witnessing a good profession, and seeing some of his family walking in the good way, he died in peace at an advanced age.

The subjoined letter, which was addressed to Miss Harrison, by one of the circuit ministers, affords additional information respecting the cause at Sandbach, at this period of its history :—

“Holmes Chapel, Sept. 4, 1793.

“Dear Sister,—I have engaged Thomas Wood, to take upon him the care of the people at Sandbach. I have no doubt you will endeavour to the utmost of your ability, to be useful to them. Let him meet all he possibly can on the Lord’s day; and I beg that you will take all possible care that the Thursday evening meeting be not made a stumbling-block to any. If it be holden as a class-meeting, do you meet them: if not, let it be a prayer-meeting; and if any choose to speak their experience, let them do it, endeavouring to edify one another, and follow such things as make for peace.

“Wishing you and yours every blessing of the new covenant,

“I am, your most sincere friend,

“GEORGE HIGHFIELD.”

Meantime, while the cause was spreading southwards, it was also penetrating westwards into the thinly-inhabited districts in the neighbourhood of *Withington*. The “glad-tidings of peace” were proclaimed at first—as was commonly the case—in the open-air, at Acre Nook. John and Robert Thorley (uncles of Mr. Joshua Thorley, of Macclesfield,) were amongst the first to receive the truth; and Thomas Braster, of Withcroft Heath, opened his house for the

class which was formed, having John Thorley for its leader. John began to labour diligently to increase the number of the little flock under his care, and soon had the happiness of bringing Mr. James Wright, of Siddington, Thomas and Catherine Bradley, and others, into church communion.

But ere long a furious storm burst on this infant cause, and almost scattered it to the winds. John Thorley was gardener to a gentleman in the neighbourhood, who was bitterly opposed to the Methodists, being instigated by one who had drunk deeply into the spirit of bigotry, which has been thus graphically described : "She has no head and cannot think,—no heart and cannot feel ! When she moves it is in wrath,—when she pauses it is amid ruin,—her prayers are curses,—her god is demon,—her communion is death,—her vengeance is eternity,—her decalogue is written in the blood of her victims,—and if she stops for a moment in her infernal flight, it is upon a kindred rock, to whet her vulture fang for keener rapine, and replume her wing for a more sanguinary desolation."

Before the fury of this demon, families fled—cottages sank into ruins, while many stood aghast, not knowing where the thunder-bolt of wrath would fall next. The sanctity of the sacred office failed to screen it from insult. Myles Martindale was once met, while on his way to an appointment in this quarter, by one of the parties referred to, who, with a horse-whip in his hand, demanded to know the business

which had brought him there. Mr. Martindale mildly enquired if there were no sinners in those parts, who stood in need of the salvation of the Gospel. This appeal, and the spirit in which it was made, disarmed the persecutor, and the messenger of the churches was allowed to pursue his way.

Constrained by the love of Christ, John earnestly exhorted his fellow-servants to flee from the wrath to come, and had the satisfaction of seeing several of them witnessing a good confession. His employer, however, like some of old, began to doubt "whereunto this would grow," and fearing, as he termed it, that the Methodists would spoil all his servants, determined to stop the infection at once, and therefore sent them a discharge. John had to leave his house and farm, and came to reside at Westheath, near Congleton. John Summerfield then ventured to open his house for preaching, but was quickly ejected, and went to reside at Peover. Driven from one place to another, the gospel ark at length found a permanent resting-place at Samuel Wright's, Withington Common.

Emboldened by this high example, the enemies of the truth carried their opposition to great extremes, so that one of the preachers shrunk from the threatening danger, and refused—a rare case—to take one of his week-night appointments at Dingle Smithy. The late Thomas Allen, Esq., of Macclesfield, resolved to supply his place, and set out in the evening, on a beautiful black mare, which he kept principally for the use of the preachers. As he drew near the

preaching-house, he met with an obstacle which placed his life in jeopardy. Some mischievous men had fixed cart ropes across the road, in order to throw his horse down. Meantime, they were concealed in the hedge, awaiting the anticipated sport. Up came the horse and rider, and the mare struck her foot against the first rope, but instead of stumbling, came to a full stand ; and then turning on one side, instantly—as though she understood the whole affair—dashed at one of the men in the hedge, who was so alarmed that he cried out, “Stop! I’ll loosen the ropes! Stop! I’ll loosen the ropes!” All this took place almost before Mr. Allen could comprehend what was the matter. The ropes, however, were loosened, and he passed forward. But on reaching the house, he found the mischief was not at an end. The congregation was assembled, and in the corner of the room, opposite to that he himself occupied, sat a figure, dressed in the most grotesque manner. The ample folds of a cloak were thrown over his body,—a mask concealed his features, while a huge wig, with flowing locks, imparted to its possessor an air of antiquity. The object remained motionless, until the devotional part of the service was over. No sooner, however, had the preacher announced the chapter and verse, and was about to read the words of his text, than the figure slowly rose, and made a solemn bow to the speaker. In the momentary confusion which followed, Mr. Allen lost his text, and while turning over the leaves of the Bible in search of it, his eye

fell upon Job's request, "Suffer me that I may speak: and after that I have spoken, mock on." This passage of Scripture was so evidently suited to the occasion, that he at once adopted it as his text, and read it in an earnest and decisive tone, turning full upon the buffoon as he uttered the last words. The scoffer was abashed, sat down and made no further attempt to interrupt the service.

Matters had, however, now reached such a point, that it became needful to employ some means of self-defence. Mr. Allen accordingly, having obtained the names of the offenders, four in number, procured a warrant for their apprehension. By some means they became aware of their danger, and absconded. In the flight, one of them fell and broke his leg, which inflamed and caused his death,—a second was afterwards transported for life,—a third for subsequent crime was hung at Chester,—while the fourth, it is believed, was never heard of more. "The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation. Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken." The Wesleyans in Withington have long since outlived this hostile feeling, and now meet with general respect and encouragement.

Little more than a year had elapsed since his last visit, ere Mr. Wesley is again found at Congleton, being the nineteenth time this town had been favoured with his ministry. "In the evening (Friday,

March 30, 1787) I preached," says he, "at Congleton, to a serious and well-established people. Here I found my co-eval, Mr. — [Troutbeck] two months (I think) younger than me, just as a lamp going out for want of oil, gently sliding into a better world: he sleeps always, only waking now and then just long enough to say, 'I am happy.'"

Mr. Troutbeck died on the 3rd of the following month, and it is said, Mr. Wesley preached his funeral sermon from: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." He was one of the first race of Methodists in this town—took an active part in its establishment, and occasionally acted in the capacity of local-preacher. He married for his second wife, the widow of Joseph Guilford, who entered the ministry in 1761, and died in 1777. Mrs. Guilford was the daughter of Mr. Hall, of Bury, near Bury, Lancashire, and sister to James Hall, who was stationed in the Macclesfield circuit in 1776. On the death of her husband, which took place in London, Mrs. Guilford received the following laconic letter:—

"Mrs. Guilford,—I have just heard of the death of your dear husband. 'Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord.' If you want any advice, or assistance, you may come to me, and you shall find me,

"Your loving friend,

"JOSIAH DORNFORD.

"May 16th, 1777, Philpot-Lane."

Mr. Dornford was a member of society in London. His sympathy on this occasion, was not of that

cheap kind which costs nothing but words, for on finding that Mrs. Guilford was resolved to return to her friends in Lancashire, he presented her with a grey horse, and a side-saddle to carry her home, to which were added, instructions where to rest during the nights which she would have to spend on the way. One of these resting places was Mr. Garside's of Congleton. By Mr. Garside she was recommended to Mr. Troutbeck, who set off to Borage, and after a visit or two, brought her back as his bride.

It is a usage in the Wesleyan connexion to furnish each member on his removal to another circuit, with a certificate, or note of removal, signed by one of the ministers of the circuit which he is leaving. This practice became a rule in 1765. It reminds us of the "epistles of commendation" referred to by the Apostle, when writing to the Corinthians, and from which we may infer that a similar custom obtained in the primitive church. The following is a copy of the one presented to Mrs. Guilford, on her removal from London :—

"The bearer, Ann Guilford, widow of our brother, Joseph Guilford, deceased, being about to return to her relatives in the country : this is to certify all our friends, that while she has been with us, she has behaved as becometh the Gospel, and has given satisfaction to all who knew her.

"P. JACO.

"London, May 31, 1777."

CHAPTER VI.

1788—1803.

Mr. Wesley opens a new chapel at Leek, and preaches at Congleton—Excites great interest—His last visit—Description of his person—Sketch of G. Shadford—Samuel Bardsley—Anecdote of him—Siddington—Origin of the Sabbath School at Congleton—Preaching commenced at Overton Hall, Smallwood — Davenport — Gillowshaw-Brook—Sabbath School—Rev. Jabez (now Dr.) Bunting appointed to Macclesfield Circuit—Anecdote.

IN April, 1788, Mr. Wesley opened a new chapel at Leek, and preached at Congleton in the evening. "Part of the congregation (he states) were the minister and the mayor, with several aldermen: but they seemed astonished while I opened and strongly applied, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me.'"

The visits of Mr. Wesley were eagerly anticipated, and when they arrived, never failed to create a great interest, not only in the minds of his people, but also amongst the public generally. Hence he could number the minister, mayor, and several of the aldermen of Congleton among his hearers. Greater honour could not have been paid him. This feeling grew as he advanced in years, so that some of his bitterest enemies became friendly to him before his death.

In a society meeting held at the close of the public service, Mr. Wesley thus addressed the friends : “ I would advise you not to lay out your money in superfluities. Get all you can, save all you can, but give all you can. I used (said he) to be fond of pictures, containing scripture pieces. At that time, I was one day walking in the streets of London, when I met an old servant. I was distressed to see her in such poor attire. Knowing I had put half a guinea in my pocket, I put my hand in, intending to give it to her, that she might buy a new gown, but it was gone. Then I recollected that I had called at the stationers and laid it out in pictures. How much more good should I have done, if I had given it to that needy woman ? ”

Two years later, Mr. Wesley made his last tour into these parts. He was now verging on his eighty-seventh year, and was everywhere seeing the ample fruits of his vast and protracted evangelical labours. Societies were multiplying—new circuits forming, and chapels with growing congregations were springing up all over the land ; while persecution had died away ; and general esteem and veneration greeted him wherever he went. The battle had been hard-fought but the victory was complete.

After opening the new chapel at Tunstal, at nine on Monday morning, April 29th, 1790, (and of which he says, it was “ the most elegant I have seen since I left Bath. My text was ‘ Let us go on to perfection ; ’ and the people seemed to devour the word. : ”) he preached at Congleton in the evening. He states,

The minister, the mayor, and all the heads of the town were present ; so that I might not overshoot them I preached on Psalm xc. 12 : and I believe God applied it to their hearts."

One of Mr. Wesley's hearers on this occasion still survives : Hannah Dale, a Methodist of the old stamp, who is now in her eighty-fifth year. She has been a member of the Wesleyan Society more than sixty years, and is still a leader of two classes, an indefatigable visitor of the sick, and an exemplary attendant on the public and social means of grace.

At five on the following morning, Mr. Wesley preached his last sermon at Congleton. Crowds came to hear at that early hour, of whom not a few were from the country. Two preachers were with him in the pulpit, and four or five sat in the singer's seat in front of it. During the sermon, Mr. Wesley related a dream which he had recently had. He thought he was walking down one of the streets of Bristol, when he saw a man that he knew well, and went across to accost him, but on making the attempt to shake hands found his own were gone. The interpretation put upon the dream was, that his work on earth was nearly done, and his intercourse with mortals was about to cease. Mr. Wesley left the chapel, leaning on the arm of Joseph Bradford and that of his host Mr. Garside. He called as he passed at the door of John Ball, James Clarke, and probably Joshua Staton's, who all lived in Wagg Street. In less than twelve months the Methodist connexion

was called to mourn the loss of the Father of Methodism.

In taking our leave of the labours of Mr. Wesley in Congleton, (which amounted in all to twenty-four visits, at some of which he prolonged his stay over several days, and preached three or four times,) we present the following description of his person, believing it will be new to some of our youthful readers :—

“The figure of Mr. Wesley was remarkable. His stature was low : his habit of body in every period of life, the reverse of corpulent ; and expressive of strict temperance, and continued exercise : and notwithstanding his small size, his step was firm, and his appearance, till within a few years of his death, vigorous and muscular. His face, for an old man, was remarkably fine :—a clear smooth forehead, an aquiline nose, an eye the brightest and most piercing that can be conceived ; and a freshness of complexion, scarcely ever found at his years, and expressive of the most perfect health, conspired to render him a venerable and interesting figure. Few have seen him without being struck with his appearance : and many who have been greatly prejudiced against him, have been known to change their opinion the moment they were introduced into his presence. In his countenance and demeanour, there was a cheerfulness mingled with gravity ; and a sprightliness which was the natural result of an unusual flow of spirits, and yet was accompanied with every mark of the most serene tranquillity. His aspect, particularly in

profile, had a strong character of acuteness and penetration.

“In dress he was a pattern of neatness and simplicity. A narrow plaited stock, a coat with a small upright collar, no buckles at the knees, no silk or velvet in any part of his apparel; and a head as white as snow, gave an idea of something primitive and apostolic: while an air of neatness was diffused over his whole person.”

Of his moral character, an impartial witness, A. Knox, Esq., thus speaks:—“I endeavoured to consider him, not so much with the eye of a friend, as with the impartiality of a philosopher; and I must declare every hour I spent in his company, afforded me fresh reasons for esteem and veneration. So fine an old man I never saw. The happiness of his mind beamed forth in his countenance: every look showed how fully he enjoyed ‘the gay remembrance of a life well spent.’ Wherever he went, he diffused a portion of his own felicity. . . . While the grave and serious were charmed with his wisdom, his sportive sallies of innocent mirth delighted even the young and thoughtless; and both saw in his uninterrupted cheerfulness the excellency of true religion. . . . In him even old age appeared delightful—like an evening without a cloud—and it was impossible to observe him without wishing fervently ‘May my latter end be like his!’”

At the Conference of 1790, George Shadford was appointed to the Macclesfield circuit, and after labour-

ing one year became a supernumerary at Congleton. Mr. Shadford was an extremely laborious and useful minister of Christ. After spending some years in the work at home, where he witnessed the conversion of his father and mother, and several other branches of his family, at the solicitation of Captain Webb he went to America. There, amidst peril and privation, he prosecuted his evangelical mission, breaking up new ground, and reaping much fruit of his toil in the salvation of sinners, and their union in the fellowship of the gospel, until his labours were suddenly closed by the war of independence. On the commencement of hostilities, he returned in company with several other ministers, to England. He had been twenty-three years in the ministry, when he came to reside in Chapel-street, in this town. Although he had retired from the regular and full work of an ambassador of Christ, yet was he in labours more abundant : preaching frequently, visiting the sick constantly, and at all hours, and faithfully discharging the duties of a class-leader, having three large classes under his pastoral care. It was by his own diligent and godly exertions that these classes had been raised ; two of which met in his own house. His preaching, viewed intellectually, was not of the highest order : but in unction and effectiveness he was surpassed by few. Being intensely devotional in his habits, he walked with God, and enjoyed in rich maturity the "perfect love that casteth out fear." He was a living sacrifice. He "kept back no part of

the price," and received in return such a luminous assurance of the Divine acceptance of the offering, that his joy was full. His heart beat strong with a holy passion for souls, by which he was borne with sweet and powerful constraint towards the objects of his benevolent solicitude : he literally toiled for souls. His zeal stood at the very antipodes of a cold virtue, or a stiff and dead formality. It was no more like those than the cold pale light of the moon is like that of the bright beams of the summer's sun. The force of his character and the power of his influence was great, and was felt far beyond the circle of the Wesleyan community. He rose early, and began the day with God. Long before the dawn of morning, parties passing to their work, often heard him engaged in wrestling prayer, or singing the following lines :—

“Oh that I might walk with God :
Jesus my companion be,
Lead me to thy bright abode,
Through the fire, or through the sea.
Then I shall no more complain :
Never at my lot repine :
Welcome toil, or grief, or pain,
All is well, if Christ is mine.”

His first wife was the widow of Captain Briscoe. Previous to her conversion she lived in the fashionable gaieties of life. Through the instrumentality of Methodism, she was convinced of the error of her ways—brought to a knowledge of the truth, and soon became

an eminent pattern of Christian simplicity and devotedness. She opened her house for the entertainment of the ministers of Christ, and amongst others received Mr. Shadford under her roof. A mutual attachment sprung up between them, which resulted in their union, and she proved a help-meet for him. It was their invariable practice to retire after meals, even when they had company, for private prayer. During the last affliction of his wife, Mr. Shadford sat by her bed under the most painful circumstances. He had lost his eye-sight, and was in a most helpless state, but resigned to the will of God. Shortly after her death he removed to Frome. Here he recovered the use of his eyes, and lived to acquire the high and deserved esteem of a large circle of friends. The sky was cloudless, the sea calm, as the breath of heaven wafted his bark triumphantly into its desired haven on March 11th, 1816, in the 78th year of his age.

The burning zeal—fervency and power in prayer—kindness to the poor—regular attendance on the public means of grace, together with his extensive success in winning souls to Christ, caused the removal of this excellent minister to be severely and long felt by the friends in Congleton. The following statement will show, both the prominent position which he occupied, and the character of the influence which he exerted. At one of the quarterly visitations, Dr. Bunting, when stationed in the Macclesfield circuit, met Mr. Shadford's three classes at Congleton, and

out of upwards of a *hundred members who were present, more than ninety were clear in their Christian experience, and many of them were living in the enjoyment of the perfect love of God.* At the time when Mr. Shadford came to this town, it was no uncommon thing on a Sabbath morning, to see a number of working-men at the chapel in their everyday dress, with a weaver's apron round their waist. At his remonstrance this unseemly habit gave way to a more becoming practice.

In 1794, Samuel Bardsley received a second appointment to the Macclesfield circuit. He was greatly beloved, for what he lacked in pulpit ability was made up by the transparent simplicity of his character, and the depth and fervency of his piety. Although his peculiarities sometimes provoked a smile, his presence diffused a hallowed influence over the circles where he moved. If a cordial reception did not always meet him on his entrance into a circuit, general regret scarcely ever failed to follow him when he removed from it. "At an official meeting, held shortly after his arrival in a certain circuit, it was intimated to him that he must expect to stay only one year. Designedly misinterpreting the speaker, Mr. Bardsley with a lisp which need not be imitated, replied, 'True, brethren, my appointment is only for one year, but we shall be so happy together, that at the end of it, you will wish me to stay a second, and perhaps the Conference will re-appoint me. The second year will be equally happy,

and as we work together, the cause of God will prosper so much that you will petition Conference to give me a third appointment, and I should not wonder if Conference granted your request. At the end of that time we *must* part, but you will be very sorry to lose me.' This put an extinguisher upon all further remonstrance. The result proved that 'Sammy' was right. So mightily grew the word of the Lord and prevailed, that his successive appointments were earnestly solicited; and at the end of the third year, the good man left an increased and prosperous society, amid universal regret and goodwill." The following were favourite lines, which he frequently gave out:—

"The Saviour meets his flock to-day;
Shall I abide in sloth at home?
Shall I behind the people stay?
If Jesus calls there still is room.
I'll go—it is the house of prayer:
Who knows but God may meet me there?"


The light still radiating from various centres, found its way to *Siddington*, and a house was opened for preaching at the Smithy in 1795. Soon after this event, Mr. and Mrs. Slater of Henshaw Hall—parents of Messrs. John and Cyrus Slater—became recipients of the grace that brings salvation, and as there was no class in Siddington they joined the society at Gaws-worth, of which Mr. J. Wright became the leader about the same time. It is a remarkable fact that eight persons, including Mr. and Mrs. Slater, met together in the same class during a period of forty years.

It is said of Mrs. Slater, that, "her religion exhibited itself in every part of her conduct; she was open, candid, generous, and sincere; ever ready to assist the destitute.

'Her's was the task to seek the lonely cell,
Where modest want and silent anguish dwell :
Raise the weak head, sustain the feeble knees,
Cheer the cold heart, and chase the dire disease.'

During the most distressing times Macclesfield ever knew, when its trade was destroyed, its houses almost desolated, and its inhabitants starving by thousands, her generosity was displayed to an almost unparalleled extent; and when prudence compelled her to pause, and her family calls forbade her giving more, she sold the produce of their farm to the poor at almost giving price; but the Lord repaid it to her bosom again ten-fold." Both Mr. and Mrs. Slater fell asleep in Jesus, and their glorified spirits have long since met amid the fadeless scenes of immortality.

It was during the superintendency of Jeremiah Brettell, in 1799, that the Sabbath-school was commenced in Congleton. At a society-meeting held by him in the old chapel, he gave an account of a school which he had originated at another place, and urged them to make the attempt in Congleton. John Oakes and John Ball resolved to make a trial, and accordingly hired a place for the purpose in Moody-street. The effort succeeded: the school became popular, and was quickly so crowded with scholars that a larger room had to be engaged in Wagg-street. This room



stood on the site which the chapel now occupies, and hence on its erection the school had to be removed to a building in High-street, at the back of Mr. Hadfield's house. Thus the church was providing herself with a nursery, out of which was to spring some, at least, of the future agents in her establishment and growth.

Meanwhile the work was spreading in the country. Overton Hall, the first preaching place in *Smallwood*, was opened about this time. The estate belongs to the University of Cambridge. It was then occupied by a family of the name of Furnivil. Mrs. Furnivil was the widow of Captain Salmon, who was brother to the late vicar of Sandbach. She was too fond of the inebriating cup, and her house was a scene of strife and disorder, until the gospel was introduced, when a happy change took place. The agent who collected the rent was a local-preacher of the name of Brandreth, from Buxton ; and who, during his visits, commenced preaching in the Hall. The word was made a blessing to Mrs. Furnivil, who was convinced of sin, and with some others was united in a small class, of which John Booth was the leader. The transforming power of the gospel was strikingly seen in the person, conduct, and house of Mrs. Furnivil, who became a pattern of christian order and excellency ; and at death, with the song of praise on her lips, passed from earth to heaven. The preaching and class were soon afterwards removed to Deer's Green, where they remained until the school-room was opened at the Moss.

The cause at *Davenport* seems to have had its origin about, or possibly a little earlier than this, but the circumstances connected with its commencement are probably gone down the dark waters of forgetfulness. The earliest preaching place within memory was at the house of Mr. H. Faulkner. Thence it passed to the house of Mr. T. Woods, of Lightwood, where a class was originated, and met by himself. On the removal of Mr. Wood to Stockery, the preaching and class were held there alternately with Lightwood; and after that, they were taken to Peter Cliffe's, where they remained until the chapel was opened in 1835.

Passing to the opposite extremity of the circuit, we come to Gillow-shaw Brook, which lies at the eastern base of Mow Cop, a celebrated hill which rises upwards of 1,000 feet above the sea level. Gillow Heath, an adjoining hamlet, claims the honour of having been the first to receive the Methodists in that locality. It formed for some years the western extremity of the Leek circuit. James Handcock, the oldest local-preacher on the plan, and then resident at Harriseahead, came and held a prayer-meeting at William Rigby's, Bradley Green; and in 1802 brought Thomas Allen from Burslem, who preached under a tree which stood in a croft adjoining the house in which Mr. Simeon Walley, a respected local-preacher, now resides. Preaching was held there only a few times, and then Thomas Boon opened his house at Newpool, where a society was raised. Thomas afterwards removed to the original preaching-house at

Bradley Green. In 1803 James Handcock was appointed the leader of the class, which office he still fills. When the class was formed it contained six members, whose names were, Thomas and Judith Boon, Hannah Rider, Elizabeth Cotterill, and Samuel Goodwin. The members were truly alive to God, prayerful, zealous, and consistent. The consequence was the class so greatly prospered, that at one time it filled both the house and parlour, numbering seventy-eight members. The Rev. Thomas Armett, who entered the ministry in 1813, was a member of this class.

The Sabbath-school was commenced in a house at Gillow Heath in 1812. The house soon became too small, and an old pottery work was fitted up, and opened for the school and preaching. The mining operations which were carried on underneath it so shook the walls, as to render it dangerous and unfit for use. These, and other circumstances, led to the erection of the chapel at Gillow-shaw Brook, situated between Bradley Green and Gillow Heath. By this means the two classes were united in one society.

The following instance of noble minded and generous conduct is worthy of record. In the year 1830, as James Holland and William Baddiley, (the former a member of society and the latter a seeker of salvation,) were working together in one of the coal mines, in the vicinity of Gillow-shaw Brook, they were suddenly enclosed with a large quantity of fallen earth

and mineral. Their fellow-workmen apprized of their danger flew to their rescue, and commenced digging away the material ; and on getting within hail, were gladdened to find they were alive. The perilous period during which the two were thus imprisoned, was spent by them in earnest prayer that God would bestow his pardoning mercy on William Baddiley, and prepare him for the fearful death by which he was every moment threatened. Whilst they were so employed, a small aperture was made by the workmen above. James had the first chance of escape, and was in the act of making for the opening, when his companion exclaimed, " Oh Jemmy, let me go first ! You are prepared, and I am not." With noble self-denial this generous-hearted man instantly stepped back, and allowed him to pass, and then followed. Another moment and he would have been too late, for scarcely had he got through, when a large mass of matter fell with a fearful crash, a portion of which struck the heel of his clog, and tore it from his foot. Eight years were added to the life of this worthy christian. He then fell a victim to one of those accidents which are of such frequent and fatal occurrence in the mines ; and which, to the miner, gives special force to the exhortation, " Be ye also ready." James *was* ready, and to him sudden death was sudden glory. William became a consistent member of the Wesleyan Society, and having reached the end of his pilgrimage, with his lamp trimmed and burning, he entered with joy

into the presence of his Lord. "Instead of the fathers shall be the children:" each of these good men has left a son whose name is on the circuit plan.

In 1801, the Rev. Jabez (now Dr.) Bunting was stationed in Macclesfield circuit, and remained two years. It is said that he at this time attracted the attention of Dr. Coke, and was selected for the missionary work, the Doctor designing him for a mission at Gibraltar. This arrangement was not however carried into effect. His richly evangelical and powerful ministry is spoken of with delight to this day, and the point, fullness, and unction of his public addresses to the throne of grace, brought down blessings, the effects of which still remain. He possessed the spirit of prayer in an eminent degree. In this exercise at times, "his whole soul seemed drawn out into direct communion with God: he seemed to rise up to the very mercy-seat, to lay hold upon the horns of the altar, and lift himself into the presence of the Deity, and there to importune until the Shekinah beamed forth in his glory, and the heavenly influence shed first upon him, diffused itself through the whole congregation, like the precious ointment that ran down to the skirts of Aaron's priestly garments; or, as though with the mighty lever of believing intercession he had forced open the gate of heaven, and the flood of glory had burst suddenly upon the waiting congregation."

A characteristic anecdote is related of him. On one occasion, he came in his usual appointment to the

Lime-kilns, but on his arrival was taken so unwell as to be obliged to retire to bed. The congregation assembled at the proper time for service, and after waiting a short period, H. B——, (then a young man, and afterwards notorious in Methodism as the leader of an extensive, but perhaps the most useful, off-shoot from the parent stem, the first scion of which was broken off and planted on the adjoining hill,) unsolicited by Mr. Bunting, commenced worship by singing and prayer. In the latter exercise he made special reference to himself, and prayed in a strain which clearly indicated his intention to go through the service and preach to the people. This was too much for Mr. Bunting, who could hear all that passed, there being only a boarded floor between himself and the speaker. He immediately rose, and in a very significant manner said to a friend who sat by the bed-side, "Charles, I'll preach, I am better now." Ill as he was he carried out his resolution, and preached to the great satisfaction and delight of the congregation.

CHAPTER VII.

1804—1819.

Congleton made the head of a Circuit—Revival—New chapel—was the Cathedral of Methodism in this locality—Trustees—Spread of the revival to Sandbach—New chapel erected there—Bosley-Works—Nantwich—Hassall-Green—Moral transformation—Narrative of the change—John Hanwell—Introduction of Methodism into Lawton and Key-Green—Withington chapel built—Old Hall—Theophilus Lessey preaches there—afterwards appointed to this Circuit—School-room erected at Smallwood—Dr. Coke preaches at Congleton—Preaching renewed at Siddington—Far-Dane-in-Shaw—School-rooms built at Congleton and Sandbach.

AT the Conference of 1803 Congleton was made the head of a circuit, having W. Shelmerdine and Thomas Pinder appointed to it. Nantwich, and some other places in the vicinity, were taken from the Chester circuit and incorporated with Congleton. The subjoined account is from the pen of John Beaumont, father of the late lamented Dr. Beaumont:—"At the Leeds Conference, 1806, I was appointed (says he) to Congleton circuit, with Mr. James Fussell. On Monday evening I arrived and preached with considerable freedom, Samuel Fox and Thomas Pemberton were stirred up to seek the per-

fect love of God. Since then the Lord hath revived his work in Congleton, and various other parts of the circuit. During this year, the Coppernall, Weston, and Chorlton societies, were raised, except a few persons at Coppernall.

“Three years before this, Congleton and Nantwich, with a few other places, were made into a circuit : properly the two ends of Macclesfield and Chester circuits made into one, with a chasm betwixt them of about ten miles distance. But this year we have happily united the two ends, and formed some very lovely societies.”

These times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, produced marked results in Congleton, which forms an important era in the history of the good cause in this town. Besides a large increase in the society, which rose from 180 to nearly 300 members, this revival is memorable as the originating cause of the present chapel. The congregation having outgrown the limits of the old chapel, it was determined to rebuild it on a much larger scale. To accomplish this design, three cottages, which stood in front of it were purchased and removed. The building, which is of brick, is 54 feet by 48, having an excellent minister's house attached. It stands a few yards from the road, with a shrubbery and palisades in front ; and the whole presents a neat and substantial appearance. It cost £3,757, and will seat about 900 persons. It was opened on the 3rd of April, 1808, by the Rev. Charles Atmore, who preached at nine o'clock in

the morning, after which the Lord's supper was administered. Mr. Gardiner preached at one o'clock in the afternoon, then followed a lovefeast. Mr. Atmore preached again at six o'clock in the evening. The singing on this high day was aided by a "select band" from Sheffield, Macclesfield, Leek, and other places, the whole being conducted by Mr. S. Wood, son of the venerable James Wood.

For some years after its erection, the new chapel might be regarded as the Cathedral of Methodism in these parts ; for it is a singular fact, that there was not at the time it was built, another chapel throughout the entire circuit. It was therefore a common centre, to which persons came from adjacent places for miles around, to worship, especially on the Sabbath morning. Since the opening of the chapel the population of the town has trebled.

The names of the trustees were Matthew Mayer, Charles Shaw, Joseph Allen, Richard Lowe, John Andrew, William Drakeford, William Forster, Joshua Staton, William Pedley, Richard Lowe (currier), Samuel Wood, William Booth, Charles Barlow, George Barlow, Matthew Hand, Charles Pedley, John Oakes.

It was found at the end of the year that there was a circuit increase of 300 members. Lydiaside, Peover, and Siddington, containing seventy members, were at the same time transferred to Macclesfield.

At the Conference of 1807, under the ministry of Mr. Fussell, the revival broke out at Sandbach. The

society had previously been in a feeble state, but now a spirit of hearing prevailed—conviction for sin was felt, and many were admitted into church communion ; so that at the September visitation, it was found that the society had increased from little more than twenty, to fifty-eight ; and by the next Conference it was enlarged to a hundred. It will be readily conceived that the memorable scenes and gracious manifestations witnessed during this extensive revival, caused the room in the old mill, where it took place, to live in the grateful recollection of some of the old members who still survive. Several persons in the middle class of society, were included in this large accession of members.

The room now became incapable of holding the overflowing congregations which eagerly sought to worship within its walls. It was therefore determined to erect a chapel. Great difficulty was experienced in procuring an eligible site, but by the blessing of God on the persevering efforts of the friends they were crowned with success. Ground was procured on the Middlewich Road, and a neat and well-constructed sanctuary was built and opened. The chapel cost £1,100, and is capable of seating between four and five hundred persons.

The revival extended to Bosley-Works. About a year before, Mr. Bradford, who was then in the Macclesfield circuit, had commenced preaching in the house of Mr. Warren, who, with his excellent wife and brother-in-law, Mr. Beresford, had recently come

to reside there. It was then transferred to Congleton Circuit. Mr. Beaumont speaks of the work thus : —“When the service was ended, one of the hearers went to Solomon Shaw’s, and said to his wife, ‘Do come here directly, for I must speak with you.’ After they got out she said, ‘Woman, I am in such distress, I feel as if I could not live ! Do pray for me !’ Immediately she began to cry out for mercy ; and in ten minutes time God spoke peace to her soul. She instantly praised God in such a manner, that Sister Shaw was glad to take her into a friend’s house, for fear she should raise the whole neighbourhood. She then gave vent to her feelings, and praised God in such a manner that a sick woman, who was lying in a room above, was affected and brought into deep distress. They prayed for her until God spoke peace to her soul, causing them all to rejoice together.”

Under a sermon from Mr. Hill, who came in the next appointment, the reviving influence descended in “showers of blessings.” Many were awakened, and ere the service closed, several had obtained redemption in the blood of Christ, “even the forgiveness of sins.” At the renewal of tickets, seventeen were received on trial ; and at the end of the year the society had multiplied from twelve to more than fifty.

At Nantwich, also, things assumed a brighter aspect. The society there had worshipped in an old Baptist chapel, and had been in a low and depressed state for some years. The usual signs of prosperity

began to exhibit themselves, and amongst these was an overflowing congregation. Out of these cheering circumstances arose the project for a new chapel, which was built on the same plan as the one in course of erection at Congleton. In the following year, 1808, Nantwich was made the head of a circuit. There were 200 members of society in the town at the time.

Will the reader now proceed to another portion of this moral field, whose evangelization we are attempting to describe? The scene to which we now invite attention, lies on the banks of a canal which skirts the south-western borders of the circuit. It was the resort of the Sabbathless, the lawless, and the profligate, for miles around. Imagine it to be the Lord's-day morning, and you may observe bands of men in their work-day dress, accompanied by savage-looking dogs, hastening to the same place of resort—one of those village pests, and the nation's curse, a low public-house. You look in vain for the sanctuary of the Lord. The dwellers on this green are suffering an utter destitution of Gospel ordinances. If there be a solitary soul longing for the courts of God's house, he must travel miles to enjoy the privilege. The mass are content to spend the day as carnal inclination and vicious habit may prompt. A noisy company has by this time filled the place of gathering, amongst whom are some of the youth of the village, receiving their first lessons in crime. Primed by deep draughts of the inebriating cup, by which all

sense of shame is drowned, the company turn out on the green, and eagerly commence their brutal sports, such as dog and cock-fights, or bull and bear-baiting. As the sport proceeds the excitement becomes intense, and the noise is like that of an angry flood of waters, as boisterous mirth—passionate words of fierce altercations—shouts of defiance or victory, combined with oaths, yells, and imprecations, ascend in mingled confusion from the maddened multitude, who thus desecrate the sacred hours of God's holy day and man's rest, by practices so profane and disgraceful. But this is not all : the worst passions of the heart are aroused—quarrels ensue, and battles follow. This adds to the confusion, by bringing mothers, wives, or sisters, to rescue an ill-treated relative, or cheer a victor, as the case may be. At length passion is exhausted by the force of its over-wrought action, and the storm subsides. But the evening of the day is spent in drunkenness and general dissipation and crime.

Such were the scenes enacted towards the close of the last century at *Hassall-Green*, and, not long prior to that, in hundreds of towns and villages in this nation, which were sunk to a state little better than that of heathenism. And such, too, were the schools in which our youth were trained to tread in the steps of their degenerate forefathers.

Revisit that village now. Again it is the Sabbath morning, and what a marvellous transformation has come over it. Whence comes this calm ? This ab-

sence of riotous and mischievous children? The village is again in motion. Neatly and well-dressed parties are seen wending their way from all points, but each converging to the same centre of attraction—the house of God. Enter with them, and the first object that meets your eye is a company of children of various ages. For the last hour and a half a band of self-denying spiritual husbandmen have been engaged, sowing the seed of divine truth in the hearts of those young people, who are collected from Sabbath to Sabbath, for this purpose, and which forms an important nursery to the little church which has been raised there.

We now present the narrative of this glorious reformation. Hassall-Green, like Wheelock, and the Rookery, must be regarded as an offshoot from Sandbach. During the gracious revival which took place there in 1807, as already noticed, a pious tradesman went thence to work at Ellen Sumner's, Hassall Moss, and afterwards at Mrs. Podmore's. Warm from the revival which was going on at home, he introduced religious topics of conversation, and when his work was done in an evening, proposed family prayer. This not only impressed the mind of Mrs. Podmore, but so alarmed her servant girl that she could find no sleep, and declared that if the stranger was allowed to pray she would leave: a threat which she carried into execution. Mrs. Podmore resolved to open her house for the Methodists, and accordingly sent her son John to Congleton in quest of

a preacher. Generally the shepherd has gone in pursuit of the sheep, but here the order was reversed, and we see the sheep in search of a shepherd. Mr. Hutton preached the first sermon there on the Sabbath morning, taking it on his way to Sandbach, where the service was in the afternoon and evening. He was followed in a fortnight after by Mr. Hanwell, who at the time was a diminutive stripling, being but five feet in height. It is said, that he sometimes preached with a power and effectiveness that completely carried away his hearers. On the passage, says West, "‘And David encouraged himself in the Lord his God,’ he rarely preached without a request for its repetition. To the afflicted believer it was a ‘feast of fat things, of wines on the lees well refined.’ Another, on the passage, ‘These light afflictions which are but for a moment,’ &c., is indelibly imprinted upon my youthful memory. The following figure will probably remain familiar to me through life, as also the preacher rising upon his toes, and giving to it the fullest volume of his voice : Methinks I see the venerable apostle of the Gentiles, with the balances of the sanctuary before him. Into one scale he puts ‘afflictions,’ and into the other ‘glory.’ Returning to the first he adds, ‘*light* afflictions,’ and in the second ‘*weight* of glory.’ With a smile of inexpressible sweetness, he adds to the ‘light afflictions,’ even now only as the small dust of the balance, ‘but for a *moment*,’ and to the weight of glory’ that wondrous word ‘*eternal*,’ and the first scale flies higher still into the air. It is ‘lighter than

vanity.' 'Paul, Paul,' then exclaimed the preacher, 'stay thine hand; Jesus's suffering saints are satisfied!' But no; the apostle of God has not completed the contrast. To that 'weight of glory' he adds that which is '*far more exceeding*' as well as 'eternal:' and the scale in which are these 'light afflictions which are but for a moment,' is raised so high that the afflictions dwindle into nothing, while the eternal glory brought near to the believer's faith, fills his afflicted soul with joy unspeakable and *full of glory*. The audience catching the speaker's inspiration, would lift up their voices in one spontaneous burst of hallelujahs, and thenceforth go on their way rejoicing."

A small class was at once formed, consisting of Ann Podmore, John Podmore, Joseph and Betty Booth, Ann Shaw, and Mary Oakes. After the marriage of Mr. John Podmore the "little flock" had to pass through many dark days of trial, but He who said "fear not," has been its shepherd, and these old disciples have lived to see it feeding in "green pastures, and beside the still waters." Both Mr. and Mrs. Podmore have for many years cherished a lively interest in the good cause at Hassall-Green.

In 1807, the Rev. Luke Barlow was sent out of this circuit into the work of the ministry. After forty years of active labour, he became a supernumerary at Knaresborough.

After various attempts we find it impossible to trace the work to its source at *Lawton*. It seems probable that Thomas Moor was one of the first to

preach the Gospel there. The preaching-house was frequently changed. It is said that the great embassy of mercy was for a time proclaimed in the house now occupied by Randal Wilbraham, Esq., at Rode Heath. For some years preaching was conducted in a cottage in Mill Terrace. About 1809, a zealous and useful local preacher of the name of Hurst, an officer in the excise, came to reside there ; and shortly after preaching was removed to Bell House, on the canal bank, and was known on the circuit plan as the "Salt Works." By the blessing of God upon the devoted labours of Mr. Hurst, the small society which already existed there, was enlarged, and the people flocked to hear the word of life. Encouraged by these signs the friends resolved to erect a place of worship. Ground was purchased of Mr. Massey, and the chapel was completed and opened in 1812. Since then it has been enlarged, and was re-opened by the Rev. Robert Aitkin.

About three miles to the east of Congleton, lies the western extremity of that vast assemblage of mountainous moor lands, which spread over the northern portions of the counties of Stafford and Derby ; and is known as the "High Peak." The nearest range of hills form the boundary of Staffordshire and Cheshire, and runs from south to north, where it terminates in full view of the town, in a fine-wooded headland called the "Cloud," more than 1,100 feet above the level of the sea. The summit commands an extensive view. To the right, the wild hills and roman-

tic vallies of the Peak appear in fine contrast with the fertile plains of Cheshire, which lie spread out in front like a luxuriant and thickly-planted garden, having Liverpool, the Welsh mountains, and the Wrekin, in Shropshire, in the distance.

The first Methodist on this hill, as far as is known, was a man of the name of Thomas Forster, who received his first good in the Leek circuit. Through his instrumentality a coitage was opened for preaching, and appeared on the plan under the name of "Cloud ;" and when a few persons began to manifest a desire to flee from the wrath to come, they were formed into a class, and placed under his care. In 1821, a small chapel was built at Key-Green, situated at the foot of the hill. The Sabbath-school commenced at the time the chapel was opened. Since the erection of a new chapel the old one has been used as a school-room.

On the removal of Thomas Forster, Mr. Drakeford, of Primrose Vale, took charge of the infant society. After it was given up by him, the cause languished, but,

" The flower that blooms beneath the ray
Of summer's cloudless sky,
May see its blossoms torn away,
And yet not wholly die."

Shortly afterwards, Mr. Thomas Smallwood came to reside in the neighbourhood, and was made the leader. The causes which had reduced Zion to a state of languor and despondency were removed, and once more

the "work of the Lord" appeared in beauty upon her. On the removal of Mr. Smallwood to the Moss, Mr. Lucas took his place.

In 1808, the society at Withington raised a commodious chapel. It has since been enlarged, and neat palisades have recently been placed in front, which give it a finished appearance. The events which form the material of the anecdote, given by Mr. Jackson in his life of the Rev. Dr. Newton, illustrative of his willingness to serve the trustees of small village chapels, occurred at Withington. Mr. Hadfield, Mrs. Garside, and other friends, had the pleasure of dining on the occasion with the Doctor, whose chair was turned into a perfect bower of evergreens and flowers.

The singers belonging to the chapel at Withington, spend the early morning and the greater part of Christmas day in going from house to house, singing carols, and receiving the free-will offerings of the families where they call. It being known that the amount thus collected is devoted to the mission cause, the friends contribute largely, so that this year they have been able to lay £9 1s. 8d. on the missionary altar.

Old Hall is an early preaching-place, closely connected with Withington. It is said, that during the time Mr. Lessey, senior, was stationed at Macclesfield, his son Theophilus came and preached one of his first sermons at the Hall. Preaching was removed thence to Mr. Bailey's of Sweettenham, and R. New-

ton's of Kermincham. A class was raised at each of these places, and was met by a good man of the name of John Hackney. After this the preaching was recommenced at the Old Hall, when John Bailey resided there, and is continued by Mr. Dale. On the death of Mr. Birtles, the late leader, Mrs. Dale took charge of the class.

In 1809, this circuit was favoured with the ministry of Theophilus Lessey, who remained two years. Thomas Hutton was his superintendent during the first year, and Z. Yeudal during the second. The pathos which Mr. Lessey threw into the hymns as he gave them out caused their poetic beauties and spiritual excellencies to tell upon the congregation, in a way that was conducive to a high-toned devotional feeling; and his preaching was not only truly eloquent, but also effective. "He scarcely preached a sermon without fruit; and oftentimes the word from his lips and from his heart, was blessed in an extraordinary degree." Some who survive retain a vivid recollection of his celebrated sermon on Deut. xxxii. 11—12. He made but a sparing use of anecdote, but on this occasion, to illustrate the part where it is said: "As an eagle stirreth up her nest," &c., he related the following with great effect:—"A widow had followed all her children to the grave, save one son. That son was able in some measure to fill his father's place, and the recollection of this fact often filled the widow's heart with gratitude to God for sparing one child to be the stay of her declining years. Intelli-

gence was one day brought her, however, that her son was drowned. What was the utterance to which her soul gave vent on receiving tidings so afflictive as these? She fell on her knees and cried, 'Lord thou art determined to have my *whole* heart, and thou *shall* have it!' "

An excellent school-room was erected at Smallwood, in 1811, and was opened by Mr. Bowers, of Chester, and his son, the Rev. John Bowers. A school had been commenced by Miss Bradford (afterwards Mrs. Higginbottom) in the kitchen of her uncle, Mr. Hildich. The school rapidly increased, so that the house and parlour, as well as the kitchen, were filled with scholars. This, of course, was inconvenient to the family, and the school still enlarging, the uncle, at the request of the niece, built a room to which both the school and preaching were removed. This was the parent school of that part of the circuit, and acquired considerable celebrity.

The Rev. John Hobson was sent out of this circuit into the regular work of the ministry, in 1811, and continued in the active discharge of its duties until the Conference of 1850, when he became Governor of Taunton College.

On Monday, Dec. 16th, 1811, Dr. Coke was united in marriage to Miss Loxdale, of Liverpool, whose truly spiritual correspondence is well known to the readers of the Methodist Magazine. On the evening of the following day the Doctor preached at Congleton. The subjoined letter, written on the day of his marriage, was addressed to Mrs. Garside :—

“Knutsford, Monday, Dec. 16, 1811.

“My dear Sister,—I intend, God willing, to preach a sermon, if convenient, at Congleton, to-morrow evening. If it will be convenient to you, my precious wife and I will take a bed at your house, and take a little dinner with you at two o’clock.

“I believe you have heard of the late Miss Loxdale, of Liverpool. She is now my excellent wife. We were married this morning, in Trinity church, Liverpool. Her young spiritual daughter, Miss Crosby, is now with us, and desires her love to you.

“I am, my dear Sister,

“Your affectionate brother,

“T. COKE.”

Mr. Hadfield had the pleasure of taking tea with the Doctor on this occasion, and was struck with his great Christian simplicity, combined with all the ease and affability of polished manners.

Two years subsequently, Dr. Coke selected William Ault, who was stationed in this circuit, as one of the band of missionaries with whom he set out to establish a mission in the East Indies. The Doctor died of apoplexy when near the place of his destination.

Mr. Ault married a Miss Brentnall, who was born at Siddington. She died on the voyage, and her remains were committed to the deep.

In the year 1813, Mr. James Wright, of Siddington, licensed his house for preaching, and a small class was met there. Preaching was afterwards removed to Hill’s Green, and finally, about twelve years

since, to Mr. Slater's, of Siddington Hall. Soon after Mr. Slater was called to fill the responsible office of class-leader, when a gracious work broke out, and he had the gratification of seeing a number of believers raised up, and admitted into church fellowship. The effect of this remarkable revival became apparent in the enlarged numbers who regularly attended public worship, and in the change which was seen in the character and conduct of those who were "translated from the kingdom of darkness into that of God's dear Son." The report of these times of refreshing spread, so that persons in distress came from Congleton, and other places, and there sought and found "redemption in the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of sins," so that of "this and that man" it shall be said, "he was born there." Some of these have entered into rest, others have removed, and a prosperous class still remains. The large room in which Divine worship is conducted is generally filled—sometimes crowded—with attentive hearers.

Far-Dane-in-Shaw was comparatively late—considering its proximity to the head of the circuit—in receiving the Gospel as preached by the Wesleyans. It is true that twice the attempt had been previously made, but it was not until 1817 that the seed took root, and brought forth abiding fruit. At this time John Plant and his wife, both members of society, came to reside in the village, and opened their cottage for preaching. Charles Hulme preached the first sermon. A class gradually sprung up, which was met

by Thomas Dale, on the afternoon of the Lord's-day ; and was succeeded by preaching in the evening.

The Sabbath-school was begun by Mrs. Broadbent, a pious lady belonging to the Established Church. On her removal it came into the hands of the Wesleyans. The chapel was erected by Messrs. Hall and Johnson, for the use of the society, at a yearly rent. It was built in 1824, during the superintendency of William Harrison, and opened by his successor, William Moulton. The property, of which the chapel forms a part, has been purchased by R. L. Ginder, Esq. ; and he has generously made a gift of the chapel to the connexion.

In 1818, the school-rooms at Congleton were built. They constitute a commodious edifice, conveniently situated at the back of the chapel. The building contains three rooms, ranging one above the other. Its opening formed a new era in the history of this institution, which became exceedingly flourishing. A catechumen class was formed out of the elder female scholars of this school, by Mrs. R. Sheldon, and was met by her as long as health would permit. It is now under the care of Mrs. Priestley. Nearly the whole of this class has been admitted into society.

During the same year, Messrs. Edwards, Summerfield, and others, opened a Sabbath-school, which had been erected for the purpose, in Chapel-street, Sandbach. This school, like the one at Congleton, has greatly aided in sustaining the congregation, and from it many a useful member and office-bearer has been

raised. It is now in a prosperous state. A gracious work is going on amongst the elder scholars, which augurs well for the future. Mr. Ashcroft has for many years taken an active and leading part in it ; and an interesting catechumen class is met by Mr. Louch, weekly. Most of the young people composing this class have entered into church communion.

We trust that the Wesleyans, as well as other evangelical Protestants, are becoming more awake to the importance of training the young. The conduct of the woodman may supply an instructive lesson. As he returns in the spring, he does not expend his time and strength on the old and grown trees, but on the *nursery*. From the roots of the young saplings that are in training there, he clears the underwood and weeds, loosens the soil, and carefully cuts away the stray branches while they are yet tender. We should justly pronounce him unwise, were he to adopt a contrary course. And yet the church has been doing, in her calling, just that for which we should condemn the woodman in his. An undue amount of the church's attention and effort has been expended on adults, to the neglect of the rising race.

CHAPTER VIII.

1819—1839.

Buglawton—Revival—Extends to Hassall-Green, Street-lane and Lawton—Class-meetings—Remarks on—Rise of the cause at the Rookery—Conversion of a Clergyman—Chapel erected at Hassall-Green—Extensive revival—Reaches Buglawton—Bosley chapel—Mrs. Garside—Mr. W. Drakeford—The Rev. C. C. Kirkpatrick—Warrenite agitation—Caused a division at Sandbach—Subsequent prosperity—Reduction of chapel debt—Split in the school at Congleton—Present state—Character of the day-school.

FOLLOWING the line which we have marked out, we come to *Near Dane-in-Shaw*, or as it is commonly called *Buglawton*. This thickly populated place has sprung up within the present century. Little more than forty years ago it contained but a corn-mill, and a cotton-mill, with some three or four cottages. Mr. Wheeldon erected the first house in the field, which is now covered with streets of buildings. Its sudden growth is owing to the erection of a number of silk mills. The silk is its staple trade, as it is in Congleton, Sandbach, and other adjacent places. As the population increased, it attracted the attention of the friends in Congleton, who became wishful to establish a cause there. It was at this juncture of time that a

pious man, of the name of Samuel Harrison, a Methodist from the Leek circuit, came to reside there, and opened his house for preaching and class. Mrs. Wheeldon, who lived and died in the faith and hope of the gospel, was one of its first members.

About the year 1821, the managers of the Waggle-street Sabbath-school, became desirous of establishing a branch school at Buglawton. The children were becoming numerous, and as there was no provision for their instruction and training, they spent the Lord's-day in idleness, play, or mischief. Mr. John Johnson being favourable to the project of the managers, built the shell of two cottages, which he let to them for the purpose. This was regarded as a providential opening. The building was fitted up with a gallery, and formed a sort of rustic chapel, to which the preaching was removed, and a school was commenced in it.

In the Congleton Sunday-school circular, for 1824, we find the following reference to this movement :—
“The managers have, by the kind help of Mr. Johnson, established a Sunday-school at Near Dane-in-Shaw, and have 200 scholars there. It is under the same management as Congleton school, but in pecuniary matters it stands on its own basis.”

Notwithstanding this auspicious commencement, both the society and the school after a time began to languish. The balance-sheet showed a yearly deficiency, which grew into a formidable debt, and so discouraged the friends, that the school would have been

abandoned but for the treasurer, Mr. Hadfield, by whose judicious counsels it was saved to us. By the exertions of this gentleman it was preserved from falling into other hands—the debt was cleared, and both the society and school have risen to considerable numbers.

Under the ministry of Messrs. Brookhouse and Cousens, who were stationed in this circuit, in 1821-2, the societies enjoyed “times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.” Many were brought into Christian communion, and some of them are pillars in the church at this day. Two years later, when William Harrison, an eccentric but truly devoted man, succeeded the above-named ministers, Lawton, Hassall-Green, and Street-lane, partook largely of the grace of God, which was vouchsafed to the circuit at this period. At the same time, a most extraordinary revival had taken place in the Pottery circuits, where many hundreds had been united to the societies.

A short time prior to this Mr. John Holland, of Smallwood, had been united in marriage to Miss Pointon, of Street-lane, and had come to reside at Roughwood Mill, near Hassall-Green. Being inclined to the Establishment, they began to consider what church they should attend. As there was none in Hassall-Green they were under the necessity of looking from home. In one direction the clergyman was fond of sport, and therefore judging that they should find but little spiritual food there, they resolved to try in the opposite. Here they found the minister with

an articulation so imperfect, that they could not understand what he said. So deeply were they disappointed, that on their return home, they sat down and wept. From that time they began to attend Lawton Chapel, and soon after a house was opened for preaching on the bank opposite to their own dwelling, and was continued in conjunction with Mr. Podmore's, until the erection of the chapel. In 1824, Mr. and Mrs. Holland joined the society at Hassall-Green, an example which was quickly followed by Mr. Pointon and several other members of his family. Mr. Pointon afterwards fitted up a room on his premises for preaching, which is still continued on the Sabbath morning. Miss Pointon, afterwards Mrs. Hall, was brought to God during this revival, joined the society, and remained a consistent and useful member until she entered the mansion prepared by a Saviour's love.

In perusing this narrative, the reader can scarcely have failed to notice with what regularity the *Class-meeting* follows the introduction of preaching into any place. Wesleyans regard the class-meeting, and similar means of grace as second in importance only to the preaching of the Gospel. The class-meeting preserves and builds up those whom the Gospel saves. As a means of grace it accords with the instincts and yearnings of the regenerate heart, for no sooner does a man get religion than he longs to find a kindred spirit—a man like-minded with himself, to whom he can communicate his thoughts and feelings, and with whom he can take sweet counsel. This impulse of

the renewed soul is beautifully expressed by the Psalmist when he says, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul;" and exemplified by the two disciples when they said *one to another*, "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" This principle lies at the very foundation of christian fellowship, the existence of which depends upon personal experimental religion. Without something of this kind—a class, or fellowship-meeting—a church is destitute of appropriate means, where the social christian principle can find indulgence, expansion, and be nurtured and matured. It will be admitted that there is no christian fellowship—in the sense in which the term is here used—in public, social, and closet prayer. There the fellowship is with God. But as in olden times, when "they that feared the Lord, spake often *one to another*," so now, the people of God need the *communion of saints*.

If it cannot be proved that class-meetings are opposed to the genius of christianity and the designs of the christian ministry, then let the objector pause ere he attempts to repudiate them. But if, on the other hand, it is shewn that they are in perfect agreement with both, then let us hold to them, as scriptural in their basis, and vital to the interests of Methodism. Their practical utility—to which thousands upon thousands can bear grateful testimony—prove their excellency and the wisdom of their appointment.

The following views on this important subject are from the pen of one of our most gifted ministers. "A powerful and pressing necessity arose, from the awakened state of the thousands who listened to the ministry of our fathers, for religious communion. Hence the establishment of class-meetings and similar means. It was found that a mere attendance upon the public preaching and monthly sacraments, could not meet the case of those who were anxiously enquiring, What they must do to be saved? Personal and direct instruction, encouragement afforded in the duty of believing in the Saviour, and express advice and sympathy on the respective subjects of experience, temptation, inward conflict, and the painful exercises of the divine life, were not only useful, but in keeping up the spirit of true religion, absolutely essential. . . . There can be no doubt that these meetings collected the scattered rays of light into a focus, gave solidity to the work, and fostered the courage and confidence of the disciples, strengthened, animated, and inflamed their piety and love; drew out their respective talents, whether for prayer, exhortation, or any other service; and consolidated their means for exertion and usefulness. The social principle is power in religion, as well as in other things; and it is especially necessary in the feeble commencement of any new undertaking. . . . Can these be abandoned? Is there not the same necessity for this assistance, stimulus, encouragement, and these guards as ever? Who will take up this part of our economy, promote

this communion of saints, and lead the people forward in the way to heaven by this form of pastoral care? We know very fully that these meetings, though, in their spirit and design, perfectly scriptural, are not in sufficient repute to be adopted by others. Then these means of grace, so intimately connected with the vitality of religion, cannot be abandoned, because the piety and holiness, of which they are very much the conservative power, cannot be sacrificed. . . . Being satisfied that the practice is in conformity with the teaching and example of the primitive church, we can endure the scoffs of the world, and the objections of doubting and lukewarm christians. We hold the faith of Christ as revealed in the divine records ; and we build the communion of saints on the experimental profession of this faith ; and judge that in this, we have the first and primary note of a true church of Christ."

The views of the Conference on this vital point are forcibly expressed in the admirable " Annual Address" for 1855. " We know not in what language adequately to express our conviction that the Lord and head of the church has used the institution of class-meetings as an instrument of blessing to thousands of His saints ; nor can we sufficiently express our sense of the evil of any feeling, any movement, or any attempt which would tend to lessen the regard of our people for that institution, or render their attendance at their classes irregular."

It is a notable fact, that almost all the objections

which have been raised against class-meetings, not excepting those of Isaac Taylor and Colquhoun, are founded in misconception, or ignorance, and therefore fall to the ground. A class-meeting is not a confessional, but a fellowship of saints—a fellowship in hopes and fears, in joys and sorrows, in faith and love. Speaking to one another in “psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs,” all

“Here enjoy the earnest given,
Travel hand in hand to heaven.”

Still following the ever advancing stream of this great work, we observe it branching off from Sandbach, and conveying the waters of life into the neighbourhood of the *Rookery*. Mr. Summerfield, then resident at the Cross, accompanied by Thomas Eaton, an excellent singer, preached the first Methodist sermon under a tree which grew nearly opposite to where the chapel now stands. Mr. Colclough followed, and then Mr. Summerfield paid them a second visit, and preaching became established. Crowds came to hear—the word took effect—a house was opened; and a number of believers were united to the Lord, and placed under the spiritual oversight of Andrew Plant of Etteley Heath. Mrs. Turner, a truly pious woman, the mother of Joseph Turner, a respected local-preacher, was one of the first fruits of the gospel at the *Rookery*.

Matthew Hassall was another zealous and devoted convert. During a dangerous affliction he was visited by the Rev. G. Harvey, the minister of Warmingham

Church. While conversing with this excellent christian, Mr. Harvey was deeply convinced of sin. He felt that he was destitute of that experimental knowledge of Christ—that perfect freedom from the fear of death, and that joyous hope of heaven which was so clearly and fully enjoyed by Mr. Hassall. For a time he struggled against conviction. He tried various expedients to obliterate from his mind the recollections of what he had heard and felt. But in vain, conviction followed him, embittered life, and caused him to doubt his call to the ministry. At length he fell at the feet of the Saviour, and like Paul submissively enquired, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” and was not long ere he found “redemption in the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of sins.” He now devoted himself to the faithful discharge of the duties of the christian ministry. He visited the sick, preached and held meetings in the cottages of the poor. His rare humility and decision were strikingly manifested by his public acknowledgment of the means by which he received his first good ; and by frequently attending the preaching and other services which were held at the cottage by the Wesleyans. On his removal to Horton near Leek, he entered into still closer union with the society by becoming a member. He gratefully enjoyed the peculiar means of grace which Methodism supplies, and heartily co-operated in its advancement.*

* See Methodism in Leek.

In noting the progress of the work in the circuit, we find, that in 1826 there were six chapels, thirty-one local-preachers, and 730 members.

In 1829 a valuable acquisition was made to the cause at Hassall-Green by the erection of a commodious and pleasantly situated chapel. The circumstances which led to it were these. Mr. Holland, feeling concerned for the welfare of the rising race, expressed to Mr. Summerfield (who had called on his way after preaching at the Bank) his determination to open a room on his own premises for a Sabbath-school. On Mr. Summerfield pointing out some difficulties, Mrs. Holland suggested the propriety of building a chapel, which could be used both for preaching and school. Both gentlemen responded to this suggestion, and the matter was at once laid before the Lord in prayer. A propitious providence encouraged the undertaking, Mr. and Mrs. Podmore gave the ground, and Mr. Pointon headed the subscription list with £10. The chapel was opened by the Revs. Alexander Bell and W. O. Booth.

One of the most extensive and genuine revivals of religion which ever occurred in the Congleton circuit commenced in 1831, and extended over a series of years. A remarkable spirit of hearing was excited—the church was aroused to prayer and effort—many were convinced of sin, and numbers were brought into the ranks of God's Israel. These special seasons of grace are remembered with pleasure by many of those who were permitted to take part in them, or

who then became recipients of justifying grace. In 1831 the number in society was 680, and in 1835 it had risen to 1,130. Thus after deducting the number occasioned by deaths, removals, &c., there was a net increase in four years of 450. It is well known that this was a time of remarkable connexional prosperity. The approach of that terrible scourge the cholera might contribute to this result; but be the cause of it as it may, it is a fact, that thousands upon thousands were added to the society at this period.

After this the numbers in the circuit declined. This no doubt was occasioned by the Warrenite agitation. But setting aside the sad effects of strife and division—those “offences” which it seems “must needs come”—we cannot but ask: Why should not the prosperity of Zion be continuous? Is it not to be feared that the reason why so many revivals are spasmodic and short-lived, is, that they come from without instead of springing from within? They arise not so much from internal life, as from external excitement. Special means may keep those who take an active part in conducting a revival agoing for a time, but if they are not *sustained by deep heart-felt piety—internal life kept up by simple active faith*—the work declines, and is followed by a reaction—a falling away. The only remedy is an *earnest and mature personal christianity*. A living *in and up* to the reviving influence, is the surest way to preserve it; and then would the work of God be perpetuated from day to day. The closet has much to do with this.

We would not be understood as saying a word against special services. We know that they have been made a great blessing. We believe too that they are still needed; at the same time, it must be acknowledged, that it is chiefly the *unbelief* and *dormancy* of the *church* that renders them necessary. If the members of our Zion were truly alive—"full of faith and of the Holy Ghost"—and constantly on the alert, as they then would be, every service, even the most ordinary, would then become in a most important sense a *special service*.

This revival extended to Buglawton, where grace descended in "showers of blessing." At that time John Lowe (uncle to the Rev. William Lowe now in Australia,) met a class of twelve persons on the Lord's-day morning. In 1834 Mr. Joseph Steele became the leader, and found it reduced to seven members. Full of zeal, which he brought from the fire which had been lighted up in the town, he adopted means for the re-animation of the languishing cause, which were happily crowned with success. At the end of the first quarter eight persons were received on trial, and forty-five were added to these in the course of the succeeding three months. So "mightily grew the word of God and prevailed."

This large accession of members, together with a growing congregation and school, rendered an enlarged place of worship necessary. Mr. Pointon having ground which presented an eligible site, application was made to him, and it was promptly met by the

generous gift of as much land as the trustees thought needful. This was considered equal to a donation of £40. Such a beginning with a subscription of £20 from Mr. J. Johnson, put the friends in good heart, and in due time a chapel was opened. Last year a commodious vestry was attached. Yet notwithstanding this, the chapel is too small for the requirements of the large school and congregation. It is due to the Sunday-school friends at Buglawton to state that it has been exceedingly fruitful in young converts, many of whom have died in holy triumph, while a goodly band of youthful disciples remain in connexion with the militant church there.

George Kennerly is a name that is embalmed in the memory of the friends at Buglawton. He joined the society there, and took a deep interest in the school. His self-denying and indefatigable labours for the welfare of this institution were kept up until it pleased God to remove him to his reward.

The beneficial effects of this extensive outpouring of the Spirit became apparent at Lawton. On the death of Mr. Brody, and after the removal of Mr. Barnett, who each, in turn, had charge of the class there, it came into the care of Mr. Wareham. During the revival referred to above, he had the pleasure of receiving from thirty to forty persons into society. Mr. Wareham was an excellent and useful local-preacher. He sustained his Christian profession with unblemished reputation ; and finished his course in peace. He was deservedly respected while living ;

and his removal has left a blank which is felt to this day. We are happy to state, that this want is likely to be met by the munificence of G. Pointon, Esq., of Mere Cottage, who is contemplating the erection of a cottage adjoining the chapel, for the residence of a supernumerary minister ; and is taking active steps to secure this important object.

Bosley also participated in the blessings flowing from this revival. The society was enlarged, and a substantial chapel was erected and opened for the use of the congregation and school. The cause there has recently been much reduced by the stoppage of the cotton works, which has occasioned the removal of about one-half of the members.

The late Dr. Hamilton represents biography as a "feeble struggle with death." In this attempt to rescue from the hand of the spoiler, and to save from oblivion the names and characters of some of the principal agents in the introduction and establishment of Methodism in this locality, we come to notice Mrs. Garside, whose maiden name was Harrison. She was born at Wheelock, in the year 1763, and became a member of society at Sandbach, as already stated in 1785. In deep distress she sought the Lord sorrowing for two years. At a lovefeast held by G. Story, on Christmas-day, in the old chapel, Congleton, she received the pardoning love of God. So overwhelming was the manifestation of mercy that she could with difficulty refrain from crying aloud, "He is come ! He is come ! I have 'found him of whom Moses in

the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth.' " Miss Harrison was instrumental in the introduction of Methodism into Wheelock, where it retains a growing hold. On her marriage, which took place in 1794, she came to reside in Congleton. In her attire she was plain, but neat—in her disposition social, hospitable, and tenderly affectionate, and in her spirit, serious but cheerful. Her faith in Christ was unwavering—it was the root of her passive graces, the instrument of her achievements, and the weapon of victory. Possessing a large measure of the love which "thinketh no evil," it will not be wondered at that she was never known to speak evil of any one. She took great delight in the means of grace, was strongly attached to her people, and to the poor was a constant friend. She was held in deserved esteem by many of the old preachers, who never failed to find a cordial welcome and a home under her hospitable roof. In her last affliction, which was lengthened but not severe, she was resigned to the will of God, and with heaven beaming on her countenance, she escaped to the realms of eternal light and love, on the 9th of April, 1831, aged sixty-seven years.

Will the reader now turn aside, and enter a retired valley, known as Primrose Vale, and gaze upon the last moments of one to whom those words are applicable: "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace." Tread softly as you enter that chamber of sickness; an aged pilgrim—a sainted spirit—is waiting at the threshold

of the failing fleshly tabernacle for the angelic convoy to usher it into the presence of the heavenly king. Hark ! he speaks. "Fear not for me, my anchor is 'sure and steadfast, cast within the vail ; whither the forerunner is for *me* entered, even Jesus.'" The hand of the foe was upon him, but thus the believer triumphs over him ; and now the frail tenement gives way, and the enfranchised soul, in its new-born freedom, wings its way to eternal bliss. Thus ended the mortal career of William Drakeford, one of the most true-hearted and consistent Methodists in this town. His union with the society continued through the protracted period of fifty-seven years. At the age of twenty he gave himself to the Lord, and soon after was united in marriage to Miss Vaudrey, who was like-minded with himself, having cast in her lot with the people of God. In the midst of worldly prosperity he was ever the same meek and humble-minded Christian. As the storm of persecution which assailed him at the commencement of his Christian course, could not drive him from the path of duty, so neither could the sunshine of affluence nor the smiles of the world allure him from it in after-life. His life was eminently holy. It might be said of him, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." He shewed piety at home. Cherishing a high esteem for the ministers of Christ, he would never suffer a member of his family to speak a word against them in his presence. He filled most of the offices in Methodism, with credit to himself and advantage to the church.

He was highly and deservedly respected by all who were capable of appreciating moral worth. At the local-preachers' meeting, where he regularly assembled with his brethren, he would remain silent, and often somewhat abstracted, except some case of gross neglect occurred, which never failed to arouse his godly jealousy, and to bring down upon the head of the delinquent burning words of indignant censure. His reproofs were the more weighty because his own conduct in this, as in every other respect, was irreproachable. The following incident illustrates his character. On a certain occasion it was announced for Dr. Clarke to preach at Macclesfield. Mr. Drakeford being exceedingly anxious to hear the Doctor, procured a supply for an appointment which he had on the same day at Withington. Anticipating a rich spiritual feast, he went to Macclesfield, and entered the chapel, but had scarcely taken his seat when his eye fell on the faithless brother who had engaged to fill his place at Withington. It did not require a moment's consideration on the part of Mr. Drakeford, whether he should stay and enjoy the privilege of hearing Dr. Clarke, or discharge the duty of supplying the pulpit thus basely deserted. He instantly rose, took his hat and stick, and walked seven miles to his appointment. Mr. Drakeford and his excellent wife stood aloof from the world; and each could say, "I dwell among my own people." They were highly exemplary in their attendance on the means of grace, neither rain nor snow could keep them from the house of God. Mr.

Drakeford reached the end of his pilgrimage on the 25th September, 1832, in the seventy-eighth year of his age.

Two chapels were erected in the circuit in the year 1833, one at Congleton Edge, and the other at Gillowshaw-Brook. In the latter place, various causes concur to render a new chapel exceedingly desirable, and active measures are now being taken to obtain this important object. There is preaching and a small class at Biddulph Park. This may be regarded as one of the oldest societies in the circuit. It originally met at the Hurst.

At the close of 1834, the Rev. Charles Cleland Kirkpatrick died at Withington, where he had retired as a supernumerary. He had formerly been in the navy, and had lost an arm in the service of his country. During his residence at Withington, his affable manners, truly Christian conduct and usefulness, caused him to stand high in the esteem of the society there. His last affliction seized him as he was returning from Macclesfield, and soon after reaching Mr. Slack's, he breathed his last. His death, and that of his host, Mr. Joseph Slack, which had taken place a short time previously, caused much regret at Withington.

The years 1834 and 1835 are rendered notorious in Methodism by the Warrenite agitation. Sandbach, Smallwood, and Brereton, were the only places in this circuit that were affected by it. The small society at Brereton was taken entirely, and Sandbach suffered a

severe reverse. Struck by a wave of that fierce strife, the society there was split into two nearly equal parts, so that out of about 130 members, little more than 60 remained. All the local preachers, save Messrs. J. Summerfield and J. Warton, withdrew. Many of the leaders, and the bulk of the congregation, and of the teachers and scholars of the Sabbath-school, were drawn away.

The old society was like a vessel, over which a rough sea has passed, and swept much of its valuable freight away. While, however, regret was felt that so much was lost, it was matter of joy that the cause was not a total wreck ; and as the sailor loves his ship the more for having weathered the storm, so the doctrines, polity, and ordinances of Methodism became increasingly dear to those who remained firm.

On Christmas-day, 1835, shortly after the division, a social tea-meeting was held, to which every member, pewholder, &c., was invited, and was attended by about 180 persons. Mr. Edwards presided and spoke, and then Mr. Summerfield explained at considerable length the constitution and discipline of Methodism. This was followed by the happiest results. It raised a barrier against which the tide of disaffection expended its last efforts. At a band-meeting, held soon after, on the morning of the Lord's-day, God graciously poured out his Spirit. A remarkable unction rested upon the meeting, and from that time the work began to revive. The society became like a pruned vine ; watered by the dew of grace, it shot forth fruit

bearing branches, and has continued in a thriving state.

At the time of the separation, the debt on the chapel was £700, it is now reduced to £200. This gratifying result is mainly owing to the persevering efforts of Mr. Summerfield, whose attention to the welfare of the cause has been judicious and unremitting. Additional accommodation being urgently needed, he has nobly offered £200 towards a new chapel.

Continuing the thread of our narrative, we come to another unhappy rent, by which a number of persons were severed from the society and congregation in the head of the circuit, and also a large body of scholars from the school. The apostolic times were not free from division, and therefore it is not to be wondered at, if Methodism has not been exempt. The unwelcome task of describing the incidents which led to this rupture, shall be done in as few words, and in as impartial a manner as possible. The then vexed—now happily settled—question of writing on the Sabbath, was the ostensible cause. At a regular committee meeting, held in 1837, the propriety of continuing this practice in the school at Congleton, was incidentally mooted. Knowing that there was a difference of opinion on the subject, it was felt to be a matter of vital importance to the peace and welfare of the school, and therefore to prevent all bad consequences, every member of the meeting pledged themselves, before the motion was put,

to abide by the decision of the majority. This precaution being taken, the resolution, that writing be discontinued, was put to the meeting, and carried by a considerable majority. At an adjourned meeting, which was held in the succeeding week, for the purpose of devising plans, with a view to instruct the children in writing on a week-day evening, the minority sent in a protest against the decision of the former meeting, accompanied with a declaration, that if writing was not resumed in the school on the Sabbath, they would withdraw. Of course the committee—to say nothing of the merits of the question—could not yield, under such circumstances.

Finding that the committee were firm, and that there was no prospect of gaining their demand, several of the teachers withdrew; and, taking a large body of the scholars with them, joined the Methodist New Connexion.

It may be safely said, that although the school is not so numerous as formerly, it was never in a more efficient state than now.

It may not be out of place here to state, that the managers of the Sabbath-school, sympathising with the important movement which took place in the Wesleyan body, in favour of education, opened a day-school so early as 1839. Three years ago, the school-room underwent an entire renovation, having received a suitable outfit. The method of instruction and training adopted in this school, are well calculated to sharpen, while they develope and invigorate the men-

tal powers ; and, as the Bible is the great text book of the school, the children are in the way of being qualified to be intelligent citizens of the world, and useful members of the church of Christ. This school is denominational, but not sectarian. It is open to all.

Too much praise cannot be awarded to Mr. Hadfield for his enlightened and firm attachment to these institutions, and to Wesleyan Methodism generally, and for the efficient services which he has rendered to almost every department of the good cause, in both the town and circuit, for more than half a century ; and by which he has won the high esteem of the Christian community of which he is one of its brightest ornaments.

CHAPTER IX.

1839—1856.

Sketch of the Rev. G. Lowe—Mr. C. Pedley—Key-Green chapel built—Mr. and Mrs. Barlow—John Jackson, Esq.—Sketch of Mr. John Edwards—Rookery chapel and school—Sandbach Heath—Thomas Garside, Esq.—Brownlow—Reduction of the debt on the Congleton chapel—Mrs. Higginbottom—Contemplated division of the circuit—Resolutions of the Quarterly Meeting—Young-men's Improvement society—Concluding remarks—Tables.

THE society in Congleton has been highly favoured in having had some of the excellent of the earth in connexion with it, whose names are still as ointment poured forth, and whose godly example is a rich legacy bequeathed to the church, by which though dead they yet speak. Such, in an eminent degree, were George Shadford and George Lowe. The residence of the former, in this town, was of limited duration ; that of the latter continued through a period of thirty years. Mr. Lowe was brought to God under the ministry of Samuel Bardsley. In 1788, he entered into the regular work of the Christian ministry, and for twenty years faithfully discharged the onerous duties of his high vocation, and saw much fruit of his labours in the conversion of sinners. In 1808, the state of his health compelled him to become a supernumerary,

and he came to reside in Congleton. From that period, however, until the close of his lengthened pilgrimage, he diligently laboured to build up the church of Christ. He preached, visited the sick, and led his class with a cheerful vigour, which never forsook him. The sprightliness, simplicity, and good humour of this happy Christian, endeared him to a large circle of friends.

Mr. Lowe's last public effort was at a meeting held in Congleton, in connexion with the ever memorable centenary of Methodism. Well knowing that his mind was amply stored with a correct knowledge of persons and events connected with early Methodism, his friends were anxious to see him on the platform. Incapable of standing, he sat while he addressed the congregation. He begun by saying:—"My dear friends, we are met to talk of things which took place a hundred years ago. But some of you will say you are not a hundred years old. No, but I am nearly ninety." He then préceeded to give an outline of the narrative contained in his "Life and Times," which has been given to the world in an interesting volume by the Rev. A. Strachan. Mr. Lowe was short in stature—lame, but muscular—had a full musical voice, and was an excellent singer. Just as he was verging on his ninetieth year, this good man went down to the grave, honoured and beloved by all who knew him; and will long be remembered as a bright example of Christian fidelity and consistency.

During the same year, Mr. Charles Pedley, brother

to Mrs. Bull, of Eaton Bank, was called to his reward. On the removal of Mr. Shadford, Mr. Pedley became the leader of one of his classes. He was remarkable for his uprightness of conduct, and took a lively interest in the prosperity of Zion. The last hours of life were dozed away in tranquillity. He slept in Jesus on November 3rd, 1839, aged seventy-two.

Mr. Pedley's excellent wife, who was formerly a Miss Vaudrey, was a consistent member of society upwards of sixty years. Her sun set in a cloudless sky, on November 30th, 1831, in her seventy-fifth year.

A substantial stone chapel, of superior design and finish, was erected at Key-Green, in 1845. In 1840, a society, consisting of seventeen members, was placed under the spiritual oversight of Mr. Joshua Ward, of Brook-house. In 1844, there was a small increase of members, when Miss Clayton and Thomas Forster, the old leader, who had returned, raised small classes, which afterwards fell into the hands of Mr. Ward. The congregation and school out-growing the capacity of the chapel to accommodate them, the friends resolved to build a new chapel. The late Thomas Norbury, Esq., of Macclesfield, gave the value of the ground. Mr. Joshua Ward drew the plans, and the lively interest which he took in the erection of the house of God was evinced by his daily superintendence of the work, until the chapel was completed and opened.

In the spring of 1840, a series of special religious

services, which were conducted in it, were productive of extensive and lasting good. The two classes suddenly rose to nearly eighty members. Some of these have declined, others have died in the Lord, and a number have removed to different parts, while a goodly band remain in church fellowship.

It will be in place here, to present a brief notice of Mrs. Webb, daughter of Mr. John Ward, of Brookhouse. Miss Ward was a teacher in the Sabbath-school at Key-Green, and was a very successful missionary collector. Shortly after her marriage she joined the society at Sandbach, and with many tears and prayers sought an interest in the pardoning love of God, and after a painful struggle the kingdom of God was revealed in her soul. Filled with a transport of joy she earnestly exhorted her unconverted relatives to seek the Saviour. Being in the last stage of consumption, she lingered a few days, and then peacefully fell asleep in Jesus on September 22nd, 1855, aged twenty-six.

Mr. Allen, father of Mrs. Pearson, of Buglawton Hall, was an excellent Christian, who deserves to be had in remembrance. Retiring and gentle, tender and affectionate, his piety was impressive by its thorough consistency. His love to the house of God was strong. It was his invariable and commendable practice to be there some minutes before the service commenced. His end was peaceful.

The subjoined account is taken from the Methodist Magazine :—"March 26th.—At Primrose Vale, Con-

gleton, aged sixty-seven, Elizabeth, relict of the late Charles Barlow, Esq., (who for upwards of thirty years was firmly attached to Wesleyanism, filled the office of trustee, steward, and circuit-steward, in a satisfactory manner, and died in the Lord, March 2nd, 1840, aged fifty-nine.) Mrs. Barlow was brought to experience justification by faith in Christ in the year 1784, and maintained an amiable character as a member of the Wesleyan society for upwards of fifty years. Her piety was evinced by a humility, consistency, and peace, which secured to her the esteem of all who knew her. During her protracted affliction, not a murmur escaped her lips ; her confidence was unshaken in Jesus Christ ; and the last words she distinctly uttered were, 'I shall soon shine.'"

The Rev. E. Telfer received his first good at Sandbach, in 1845, where he commenced his pulpit labours. He removed to Nantwich circuit, and thence was sent into the work of the ministry, in 1848.

Death, the insatiate foe, who is ever making new conquest of subjects to people his vast dominions, carried off in the summer of 1846, John Jackson, Esq. About two years after the erection of the chapel, in Congleton, he came to hear Mr. Lessey, and was so delighted with the whole service that he at once took a pew, and with his family became a regular attendant. He and his wife soon joined the society, and afterwards two of his daughters did the same. As a class-leader, he was affectionate and edifying—as a trustee and steward, he was faithful—as secretary

of the school, he was attentive and diligent—as a magistrate, he was impartial and gave general satisfaction. His last affliction was short, but it found him prepared, and on the 8th of August, 1846, he regained the society of the sainted spirit of his wife, who had departed in peace nearly two years previously.

In the succeeding year, the society at Sandbach lost a valuable member, whose amiable disposition and truly Christian conduct had given him a high place in the affections of his brethren, as well as in the esteem of the world generally. This was Mr. John Edwards. Being brought up in the Foundling Hospital, London, he had the melancholy grief of never knowing his parents. At the age of ten he was received into the family of the Rev. Peter Mayer, vicar of Prestbury, whose kindness, in a measure, supplied the place of parental affection. When but twelve years of age, his master died, and young Edwards became a resident with his son-in-law, Dr. Latham, a physician, with whom he remained until the Doctor's decease, in 1843. From various branches of the Latham family, Mr. Edwards received gratifying marks of respect and kindness.

An alarming Providence was the means by which Mr. Edwards was awakened to a discovery of the guilt and peril of his soul. The circumstances were these : to assuage the malady under which it is well known that his Majesty George III. suffered, the royal physician advised a visit to the Haymarket Theatre. Mr. Edwards persuaded a piously-inclined female fellow-

servant (who afterwards became his wife,) to go, more to see the King than the performance. A great crowd was attracted to the theatre, and by some means seventeen persons were suffocated in the passage to the pit. Mr. Edwards and his companion were only preserved from the same fate by the timely introduction of a current of air, which reached them as they were gasping for breath. A second visit to the theatre, proved still more eventful to Mr. Edwards, for on entering this school of immorality he was seized with an overwhelming horror, which settled into deep godly sorrow for sin, and a strong aversion to all sinful amusements. In about two months he found peace through believing in Jesus, and was filled with unspeakable joy. "The Spirit itself bore witness with his spirit, that he was a child of God." Mr. Edwards now became a worshipper at Lady Huntingdon's chapel, Spitalfields, and in 1800 attended the ministry of Mr. Williams, Gate-street chapel; and four years after that, became a hearer of the devoted R. Cecil, at St. John's chapel, Bedford-row; where Dr. Latham's family attended. In 1807, Mr. Edwards came to reside at Booth-lane, and before the end of the year entered into fellowship with the Wesleyan Society at Sandbach. In 1816, he was made the leader of a class, which office he filled with efficiency, and to the great profit of those who were under his care. After his removal to a house which he built at Sandbach, and now named "Wesley Cottage," he was able to meet his class under his own

roof, a privilege which he highly prized, and which he enjoyed until within a few months of his death. Mr. Edwards was a good man—a happy, useful christian; and was much beloved. During his last affliction his consolations were strong—his prospects cloudless, and his end eminently triumphant. He died December 29th, 1847, in the seventy-sixth year of his age.

In the following year the cause at the Rookery was strengthened by the erection of a place of worship. This was accomplished by turning the old preaching-house into a very neat and tasteful sanctuary. The excellent order in which it is kept reflects great credit on the society-steward, Mr. Billington, and on the friends there generally. A Sabbath-school was commenced a few years since by Messrs. Bourne, Hodson, and others, which now numbers about eighty scholars, and is full of promise. The servants of Christ ever find a cordial welcome at Mrs. Boston's, and her son's, Mr. F. Boston, Booth-lane. The Rookery is noted for its sustained attachment to the missionary cause, and its praise, in this respect, is in all our churches.

In 1850 a very excellent chapel and house were erected at Sandbach Heath, and may be regarded as a feeder to the town chapel. Mr. Thomas Evans broke ground there by conducting service in the open air, after which Mrs. Thompson opened her cottage for preaching. On the formation of a society, Mr. Summerfield, who then resided at the Cross Farm, took charge of it. The society prospered, and a part of

the members were placed under the care of Mr. Samuel Walker, of the Oak Farm, who sustained the important relationship of leader until his death, when Joseph Lees took his place; and when Mr. John Summerfield, junior, succeeded his father at the Cross, the class also came into his hands.

Mr. Summerfield took a deep interest in the erection of the chapel—liberally subscribed towards it, and on the winding up of the financial account, in order to meet the pledge given to the chapel-building committee, he generously laid down the deficiency amounting to £36.

As the stream of time with its living freight rolls onward, another and another disappears from the surface. To one we have to bid adieu in youth, some linger to a ripe old age, and others depart while yet in manhood's prime. It was thus with Thomas Garside, Esq., who was taken away in the midst of his days and usefulness. He was the only son of the before-named Thomas and Elizabeth Garside. Enjoying the inestimable advantage of a decidedly religious training, he feared God from his youth. His tender, filial affection, and cheerful obedience to his excellent widowed mother were remarkable, and furnished a fine example to young people. On the death of his parent he entered into closer union with the Wesleyan church, and became a member of Mr. Hadfield's class. He affectionately discharged the conjugal and parental duties which devolved upon him; and his sincere piety, shed a serene and happy influence

over the domestic circle of which he was the head. Although retiring in his habits, his heart was formed for ardent and enduring friendship, and men of a kindred spirit found him a pleasant companion. He seemed never more happy than when surrounded by the ministers of Christ. To them his hospitable dwelling was always open, as it had been in the days of his father; and from him they invariably received an open-hearted and cordial welcome. He was a decided Wesleyan, and took a deep interest in all things that concerned the welfare of the cause. The suavity of his manners—the kindness and generosity of his nature—and the noble frankness of his spirit, caused him to stand deservedly high in the esteem of a large circle of friends. He filled the offices of society, circuit, and trustee's steward with efficiency. His end, which was rather sudden, presented a scene which might well prompt the prayer: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." This event took place September 3rd, 1851, in the fifty-fifth year of his age.

At *Brownlow* there is a small chapel which was erected in 1852. It stands in the midst of a scattered population. The small society has been recently reduced by the death of two of its members—William Witters, a man of unobtrusive piety but of sterling worth; and Mary Robinson, who was a consistent member of the society more than forty years. She was strongly attached to the people of God—a regular attendant on the means of grace, and her delight

was in the law of the Lord. Some of her last words were, "Bless the Lord! Glory! Hallelujah! I shall soon be with Jesus." Without a sigh she gently fell asleep in Jesus, aged fifty-six years. There was preaching at Chance Hall many years before the chapel was erected. Samuel Dale has been the leader upwards of thirty years.

By a noble effort the oppressive debt on the Chapel Trust property in Congleton has been recently reduced from over £2,500 to £1,320. Various sources contributed towards the accomplishment of this object. A Bazaar—principally furnished by the taste, industry, and liberality of the ladies of this and some of the adjoining circuits, produced £506: subscriptions £265, and a loan from the Relief and Extension Fund of £400, making a total of £1,171. Thus placing the trust in more easy circumstances, and preparing the friends for another generous effort, by which the chapel may become—as all chapels ought to be—free from debt. Some years back, a commodious vestry was attached to the chapel, and a fine-toned organ was introduced into the orchestra which was erected over it.

During the past year, the society at Sandbach was called to mourn the departure of one of its brightest ornaments, by the death of Mrs. Mary Higginbottom, sister to Mrs. Hutton and Misses Bradford of Congleton. She was convinced of sin while hearing Mr. William Dawson at Macclesfield, (where she then resided,) and soon after became a recipient of the pardoning love of God through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; and from that time became a burning and

shining light. Her zeal, intelligence, and high christian consistency, together with her diligent attendance on the means of grace—not omitting the five o'clock service—were too prominent to pass unnoticed. Hence she was made the leader of two classes, a tract distributor, Sabbath-school teacher, missionary collector, &c. On her removal to Mill Hill near Sandbach, she became the leader of two important classes, over which she watched with jealous fidelity, prompted by the most affectionate solicitude for the welfare of each member. She was early called to prove that Christianity is a system of discipline as well as of privilege. She was long placed in the school of trial : but her profiting was strikingly apparent. She became a pattern of humility and meekness. As she advanced in years her christian graces, sunned by the smile of God, mel-
lowed and cast a heavenly fragrance around her. During her last protracted affliction, her mind was abundantly supported by the consolations of the gospel ; so that in the patience of hope she calmly waited until the prison walls of the flesh gave way, and her happy spirit escaped to boundless life, on the 29th of July, 1855, aged sixty-seven.

A deeply interesting subject is just now exciting the attention of the friends in this circuit. It is nothing less than its division, by making Sandbach the head of a small but compact circuit. The friends there have long cherished a laudable desire to have a minister resident amongst them. There seems to be but one opinion as to the desirableness of the mea-

sure ; but to some minds "the ways and means" present a difficulty. It is admitted that there would be no difficulty if only all the members of our societies were whole-hearted in their attachment to the cause of God, and would support it with anything like their ability. The fact is, that while a few give to the extent of their ability, others, who are far more able, give comparatively nothing. Undoubtedly this arises, in some cases, from a covetous disposition, and is the result of a low state of grace ; but we believe that in not a few others, it is for want of more information on the subject of giving, or more properly, Christian *stewardship*. Christians, as a whole, have hitherto failed to understand the nature of their stewardship. It will be admitted that, under the Old Testament dispensation, the people of God were allowed to amass wealth, and to transmit it to their children, while a tenth only of their substance was to be consecrated to God. It is equally clear that under the Gospel dispensation we are required to hold all our property in trust for God, as the *stewards* of his bounty. If Christians are to present *themselves* a living sacrifice, and if they are to keep back "no part of the price," then will their property be included, as well as their talents, time, and influence, in the act of self-dedication. But few understand the spirit of the act, by which the poor widow was prompted to give her two mites, nor yet the Saviour's comment upon it. No one will suppose that we mean that a man should give the principal—literally all his living—but that he

should work the principal more with an eye to the glory of God, and less with a view to self-aggrandisement.

The following views of a recent writer, bear on the subject of the division of the circuit :—" If the principles of Wesleyanism are ever to pervade the masses of the country, they must be effectually strengthened. The larger circuits and societies must be broken into smaller sections, and the number of diligent and faithful pastors speedily and greatly multiplied. The superintendents must, if possible, be relieved from their merely secular duties ; and the ministers generally, be required to devote a portion of their time to the inspection and supervision of the numerous schools that are springing up in various parts of the kingdom. At present, this is impossible ; for it is an admitted fact that the Wesleyan itinerancy makes larger demands upon the time and energies of man, than almost any other profession."

While this work is in the press, the March Quarterly Meeting has been held in Congleton, when the following propositions were submitted to the meeting : First : " That this circuit (Congleton) be divided at the ensuing Conference, and that Sandbach, with the Rookery, Hassall-Green, Lawton, Street-Lane, Smallwood, and Sandbach-Heath, annexed, be formed into a separate circuit, to be called Sandbach circuit ; and that the Annual District Meeting, to be held in May next, be respectfully requested to sanction the aforesaid measure ; and that the Wesleyan Methodist Conference, at their next annual meeting, be earnestly

solicited to confirm the said proposed division, by appointing a married minister to reside at Sandbach." This resolution, moved by Mr. Summerfield, seconded by Mr. Williams, supported by Mr. Ashcroft, was carried unanimously. Second: "That the then Congleton circuit, desire the ensuing Conference to appoint a newly-married minister as Mr. Dyson's successor." Moved by Mr. S. Walley, seconded by Mr. W. Chad-dock, and carried with only one dissentient. The thanks of the meeting were presented to the ministers for the kind and gentlemanly manner in which they had conducted the entire business, and a unanimous and cordial invitation was given to the Rev. Joshua Priestley, to remain a second year.

A Young Men's Improvement Society has been recently organised by our esteemed superintendent, the Rev. Joshua Priestley, under whose judicious care the large number of young men who already attend, will receive Biblical instruction, acquire mental habits, and derive religious advantages such as will train and fit them to be intelligent and useful members of civil society, and of the Christian church.

Thus, then, have we endeavoured to follow one of the ever-multiplying streams of Methodism, as it has diffused the waters of life over this part of the nation, and under its fertilizing power we have seen the "desert made like the garden of the Lord." The great work which God has wrought in this little corner of his vineyard, is only a sample of what he has done in hundreds of other parts, both at home and

abroad. Nor is the good confined to us : other sections of the church, and in fact the world feels the effect of this mighty out-pouring of the Spirit.

An exciting question, however, now is,—What is to be the future of Methodism ? It is a singular fact that most of the recent writers on Methodism when touching this subject, are of one mind. They all admit that it is an extraordinary work of God, and that the churches as well as the world stood in great need of it at the time of its appearance, and yet speak of its future in tones of despondency or something worse. They say it is “on the decline, its day is passed and its work is done.” They speak of it as exhibiting signs of age and decrepitude. One represents it as having passed its spring and summer, and entered its autumn, and that already it looks like a sere leaf. It should be borne in mind that these gloomy prognostications come “from without,” and that there is nothing new in them, being but one of the evils Methodism has had to contend with from the first. They may arise from imperfect acquaintance, or from a lingering of the old leaven of prejudice. No such apprehensions or evil foreboding are entertained by the body itself, except it may be a few whom Mr. Wesley designated *croakers*. Our oldest ministers—and they are most capable, from personal observation, of comparing the present with the past—with one voice say the former times were not better than these. And surely if we look at the rapid growth and extensive prevalence of Methodism, there is no room for desponding fears. We are amongst those who

think and believe that while Methodism has imparted of her own light and heat—vitality and power to other churches, so far from having thereby exhausted her mission, as some think, God has a yet vastly great, evangelical, and educational work for her to do, both at home and abroad. We believe she is as much needed by the world, and just as much adapted to meet those needs, as ever.

In glancing at the present position of Methodism, it will be admitted that, generally speaking, we have not taken hold of the poorest—we have not reached the outcast and dregs of society. But we have taken hold of the comparatively poor, and have lifted them up and bettered their condition. Many a well-to-do man would, at this moment, have been in a state of squalid poverty had not Methodism taken him by the hand. It was she that saved him from rags—put him on his feet—gave him a character, and placed him in the path of industry in which he has found both affluence and position. Nor has Methodism reached the higher walks of social life. She has visited but few of the halls and mansions of the great ones of the earth. She cannot number many poets, philosophers, warriors, and statesmen, in her ranks, but she has taken possession of what is perhaps more valuable, the bones and sinews of the nation. If Methodism is not to be found in the mansions of the high-born, it is to be found in the offices and counting-houses of professional and mercantile men. If there is but little of it in the nation's senate house, there is much of it scattered amongst the spindles and

looms of our manufacturing population. If in some cases the country squire still curls the lip of pride and turns from it with scorn, many of his humble neighbours rejoice in it as a richer patrimony than he can leave to his first-born. Methodism has found its way to the extremities of the land, and is spreading over the surface of the globe. It flourishes equally on the storm-swept mountain, and in the sunny vale—in the busy crowded city and in the solitary waste. God has given us a good share of the practical wisdom, working energy, and resources of the nation; and therefore we have access to the masses around, below, and above us. Such is our position. Our fathers laboured and we have entered into their labours. It cost them much self-denial, hard toil—the lives of some—and many a hard-fought battle, but the ground is won, and Methodism has been handed down to us divested of reproach—it is no longer a byeword. It comes to us fraught alike with immense *advantages*, *responsibilities*, and *duties*. On the manner in which we improve the first and discharge the last depends, not only our prosperity, but, perhaps, our future existence. We have but one desire, and that is, let us imbibe the spirit and copy the example of our fathers, whose godly labours have brought Methodism to be, what we see it at this day. Having received the truth, like our venerable founder let us *live it*, and in living it we shall like him *diffuse it*, and then and thus only, will Methodism be perpetuated till time shall be no more.

THE NAMES OF THE MINISTERS WHO HAVE
TRAVELLED IN THE CONGLETON CIRCUIT,
TOGETHER WITH THE NUMBERS IN SOCIETY.

YEAR.	NAMES OF MINISTERS.	No. in Society.
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CESHIRE.

1765 ...	Robert Roberts, John Shaw, Joseph Guilford	
1766 ...	Thomas Johnson, Parson Greenwood	...
1767 ...	Thomas Taylor, Mosely Cheek	... ..
1768 ...	Thos. Oliver, W. Harry, Stephen Procter	...
1769 ...	John Shaw, Richard Seed, Samuel Bardsley	

MACCLESFIELD

MADE THE HEAD OF A CIRCUIT.

1770 ...	Robert Costerdine, William Lennel	... ..
1771 ...	John Shaw, Samuel Smith, Thomas Tatton	...
1772 ...	Sam. Woodcock, Daniel Evans, John Bristol	975
1773 ...	Thos. Hanson, Thos. Westall, Sam. Bardsley	1076
1774 ...	Thos. Hanson, John Poole, Wm. Percival	1202
1775 ...	Duncan Wright, John Poole, Wm. Percival	1238
1776 ...	Duncan Wright, Thos. Hanby, James Hall	1260
1777 ...	John Shaw, Jasper Robinson, Thos. Hanby	
1778 ...	John Shaw, Richd. Manners, Jerh. Brettell	1160
1779 ...	John Brettell, Jerh. Brettell, Robt. Hayward	1236
1780 ...	Robt. Roberts, Robt. Costerdine, T. Corbett	1380
1781 ...	Robt. Roberts, John Hampson, jun., John Leech ; Richard Seed, <i>Supernumerary</i>	... 1326
1782 ..	J. Rogers, Chris. Pearson, Wm. Myles, Wm. Simpson	... .. 1325

YEAR.	NAMES OF MINISTERS.	No. in Society.
1783 ...	J. Rogers, Samuel Bardsley	1380
1784 ...	Joseph Bradford, William Percival	* 800
1785 ...	Joseph Bradford, Thomas Dixon	912
1786 ...	George Story, William Thoresby	922
1787 ...	George Story, Thomas Smith... ..	972
1788 ...	John Allen, John Tregortha, G. Highfield ..	972
1789 ...	John Allen, Samuel Yates, Robert Lomas ...	1060
1790 ...	Andrew Inglis, Geo. Shadford, Wm. Dufton	1090
1791 ...	John Goodwin, John Denton, John Furness ; George Shadford, <i>Supernumerary</i>	1140
1792 ...	John Goodwin, Geo. Lowe, Chas. Tunnicliffe ; George Shadford, <i>Supernumerary</i>	1214
1793 ..	John Mason, George Highfield, Geo. Lowe ; George Shadford, <i>Supernumerary</i>	1300
1794 ..	John Mason, George Highfield, S. Bardsley ; George Shadford, <i>Supernumerary</i>	1320
1795 ...	Geo. Snowden, John Booth, Robt. Crowther ; George Shadford, <i>Supernumerary</i>	1355
1796 ...	G. Snowden, Miles Martindale, Thos. Greaves	1375
1797 ...	R. Reece, Miles Martindale, John Knowles ; Thomas Greaves, <i>Supernumerary</i>	1352
1798 ...	R. Reece, G. Marsden, James Townley ...	1618
1799 ...	Jerh. Brettell, G. Marsden, John Heywood...	1669
1800 ...	J. Brettell, Thos. Hutton, Cuth. Whitesides ..	1680
1801 ...	J. Brettell, Thos. Hutton, Jabez Bunting ...	1445
1802 ...	Jos. Entwisle, G. Morley, Jabez Bunting ...	1332

CONGLETON IS MADE THE HEAD OF A
CIRCUIT

1803 ... Wm. Shelmerdine, Thos. Pinder

* Burslem Circuit formed, taking 694 members from Macclesfield.

YEAR.	NAMES OF MINISTERS.	No. in Society.
1804 ...	Wm. Shelmerdine, Henry Anderson...	... 480
1805 ...	G. Snowden, John Hearnshaw ...	... 480
1806 ...	John Beaumont, John Fussell ...	... 570
1807 ...	John Beaumont, William Hill ...	... 800
1808 ...	Thomas Hutton, John Hanwell ...	... 1010
1809 ...	Thomas Hutton, Theophilus Lessey, jun., G. Lowe, <i>Supernumerary</i> ...	... *520
1810 ...	Zech. Yewdal, T. Lessey, jun. ; G. Lowe, <i>Sup.</i>	560
1811 ...	R. Hopkins, J. Wheelhouse ; G. Lowe, do.	540
1812 ...	R. Hopkins, William Ault ; G. Lowe, do.	560
1813 ...	R. Hopkins, Peter Prescott ; G. Lowe, do.	543
1814 ...	Cuth. Whitesides, Jas. Hyde ; G. Lowe, do.	500
1815 ...	Cuth. Whitesides, Jos. Lewis ; G. Lowe, do.	469
1816 ...	John Denton, Robt. Bentham ; G. Lowe, do.	470
1817 ...	John Denton, Ch. Hulme ; G. Lowe, do.	454
1818 ...	Thos. Hutton, Ch. Hulme ; G. Lowe, do.	460
1819 ...	T. Hutton, Ab. Watmough ; G. Lowe, do.	470
1820 ...	T. Hutton, Ab. Watmough ; G. Lowe, do.	480
1821 ...	J. Brookhouse, Mich. Cousens ; G. Lowe, do.	495
1822 ..	J. Brookhouse, Mich. Cousens ; G. Lowe, do.	550
1823 ...	Wm. Harrison, Jas. Sheriffe ; G. Lowe, do.	650
1824 ...	Wm. Harrison, Jas. Sheriffe ; G. Lowe, do.	700
1825 ...	Wm. Moulton, Jos. Jackson ; G. Lowe, do.	790
1826 ...	Wm. Moulton, Jos. Jackson ; G. Lowe, do.	730
1827 ...	R. Smetham, Jas. Smetham ; G. Lowe, do.	696
1828 ...	R. Smetham, Jas. Smetham ; G. Lowe, do.	700
1829 ...	R. Smetham, Jas. Smetham ; G. Lowe, do.	660
1830 ...	Jas. Miller, J. B. Wittingham ; G. Lowe, do.	670
1831 ...	Jas. Miller, J. B. Wittingham ; G. Lowe, do.	680
1832 ...	Jas. Miller, J. B. Wittingham ; G. Lowe, do.	700

* Nantwich Circuit formed, taking from Congleton 490 members.

YEAR.	NAMES OF MINISTERS.	No. in Society.
1833 ...	G. Burley, Samuel Tindall ; G. Lowe, <i>Sup.</i>	1000
1834 ...	G. Burley, Samuel Tindall ; G. Lowe, do.	1080
1835 ...	Sam. Sewell, Sam. Tindall ; G. Lowe, do.	1130
1836 ...	S. Sewell, Wm. Davis, 3rd ; G. Lowe, do.	1125
1837 ...	Wm. Davis, 3rd, J. Keeling ; G. Lowe, do.	1025
1838 ...	W. Parker, J. Keeling ; G. Lowe do.	1015
1839 ...	W. Parker, W. Lindley ; G. Lowe and T. Hutton, <i>Supernumeraries</i> ...	1016
1840 ...	W. Parker, W. Lindley ...	981
1841 ...	James Bumstead, W. Lindley ...	952
1842 ...	James Miller, J. T. Yeates ...	858
1843 ...	James Miller, J. T. Yeates ...	797
1844 ...	J. B. Holroyd, Charles Hawthorne ...	824
1845 ...	J. B. Holroyd, Charles Hawthorne ...	830
1846 ...	John Raby, Abraham Stead ...	828
1847 ...	John Raby, Thomas Brooks ...	842
1848 ...	John Raby, Thomas Brooks ...	864
1849 ...	John D. Carey, Thomas Brooks ...	915
1850 ...	John D. Carey, George Hurst ...	980
1851 ...	John D. Carey, George Hurst ...	1033
1852 ...	George Oyston, George Hurst ...	1040
1853 ...	George Oyston, John B. Dyson ...	1040
1854 ...	George Oyston, John B. Dyson ...	862
1855 ...	Joshua Priestley, John B. Dyson ...	914

TABLE I.

CHAPELS.					SCHOOLS.		
Name.	When built.	Cost.	Seats.	Debt.	Com-menced.	Scholars.	Teachers.
Congleton	1807	£3751	900	£1320	1799	280	44
Sandbach	1810	1100	400	200	1818	214	26
Withington	1808	700	300	350	1815	62	8
Lawton	1812	250	250	None.	—	—	—
Hassall-Green	1829	288	200	52	1829	72	14
Smallwood	1811	—	180	None.	1806	32	5
Davenport	1835	156	130	None.	1843	20	3
Key-Green	1845	350	229	95	1821	100	10
Dane-in-Shaw	1825	230	150	None.	1824	60	10
Bosley	1832	250	200	None.	1806	43	7
Gillow-Shaw Brook	1833	179	200	None.	1812	130	30
Near Dane-in-Shaw	1835	338	250	150	1824	333	32
Congleton Edge	1833	90	80	26	1224	42	7
Brownlow	1852	118	100	51	—	—	—
Biddulph-Moor	1818	300	230	100	1815	120	20
Rookery	1848	120	140	—	1850	80	6
Sandbach-Heath	1851	305	160	50			
TOTAL		£8525	4090	£2384		1588	222

TABLE II.

PLACES.	LOCAL PREACHERS.	LEADERS.
<i>Congleton</i>	... William Hadfield...	William Hadfield
"	... Thomas Buckley ...	Thomas Buckley
"	... James Albiston ...	George Forster
"	... John Mosedale ...	Henry Swindells
"	... George Forster ...	Wm. Triner
"	... William Large ...	Thomas Steele
"	... Henry Swindells ...	Robert Pedley
"	... Joseph Steele ...	John Johnson
"	... George Carter ...	Hannah Dale
"	... William Triner ...	Mary A. Priestley
"	... Thomas Carter ...	Ph. Cumberlidge
"	... George Pedley ...	Mary Platts
"	... Thomas Steele ...	Cath. Bradford
"	... George Kinsey ...	Jane Robinson
"	... Robert Pedley ...	
"	... Wm. Triner, jun....	
Mr. W. Staton is the Society's Steward, and Mr. R. Sheldon is the Poor's Steward, and Treasurer for the New Auxiliary Fund.		
<i>Sandbach</i>	... John Summerfield	J. Summerfield
"	... Thomas Evans ...	Thomas Evans
"	... James Rathbone ...	J. Summerfield, jun.
"	... J. Summerfield, jun.	Thos. Ashcroft
"	... Robert Allen ...	Robert Granger
"	...	Edward Eardley
"	...	F. C. Louch
"	...	Joseph Lees
Mr. Walton is the Society's Steward.		
<i>Withington</i>	... Thomas Raylance...	Samuel Bloor
"	...	Joseph Slack
"	...	Cyrus Slater
<i>Siddington</i>	...	John Slater
<i>Lawton</i>	... Thos. Thorley ...	Thomas Dale

PLACES.	LOCAL PREACHERS.	LEADERS.
<i>Hassall-Green</i>	... John Holland	... John Holland
„	... Jas. Proudlove	... Jas. Proudlove
„	...	... Thomas Cooper
Mr. Williams is the Society's Steward.		
<i>Smallwood</i>	... Samuel Dale	... Peter Minshall
„	... Daniel Jepson	... Daniel Jepson
<i>Davenport</i>	...	... Peter Cliffe
<i>Key-Green</i>	... Joshua Ward	... Isaac Johnson
„	...	... Thomas Brown
<i>Dane-in-Shaw</i>	... Richd. L. Ginder	... Richd. L. Ginder
„	...	... D. Birchenough
„	...	... John Ward
<i>Bosley</i>	...	... Jos. Davenport
<i>Gillow-Shaw Brook</i>	... George Carter	... George Carter
„	... Simeon Walley	... Simeon Walley
„	... Samuel Ball	...
„	... Ralph Holland	...
„	... John Baddiley	... John Baddiley
<i>Buglawton</i>	...	... Joseph Steele
„	...	... Thomas Cotterill
„	...	... John Hulme
<i>Congleton Edge</i>	... Wm. Chaddock	... Wm. Chaddock
„	...	... Charles Shaw
<i>Biddulph Moor</i>	...	... Thomas Lawton
„	...	... Samuel Bailey
<i>Brownlow</i>	...	... Samuel Dale
<i>Rookery</i>	... Joseph Turner	... Joseph Turner
„	... Thomas Highfield	... Thomas Highfield
„	...	... J. Hodgson
Mr. Billington is the Society's Steward.		
<i>Old Hall</i>	... Samuel Gee	... Mary Dale
<i>Biddulph Park</i>	...	... G. Carter

